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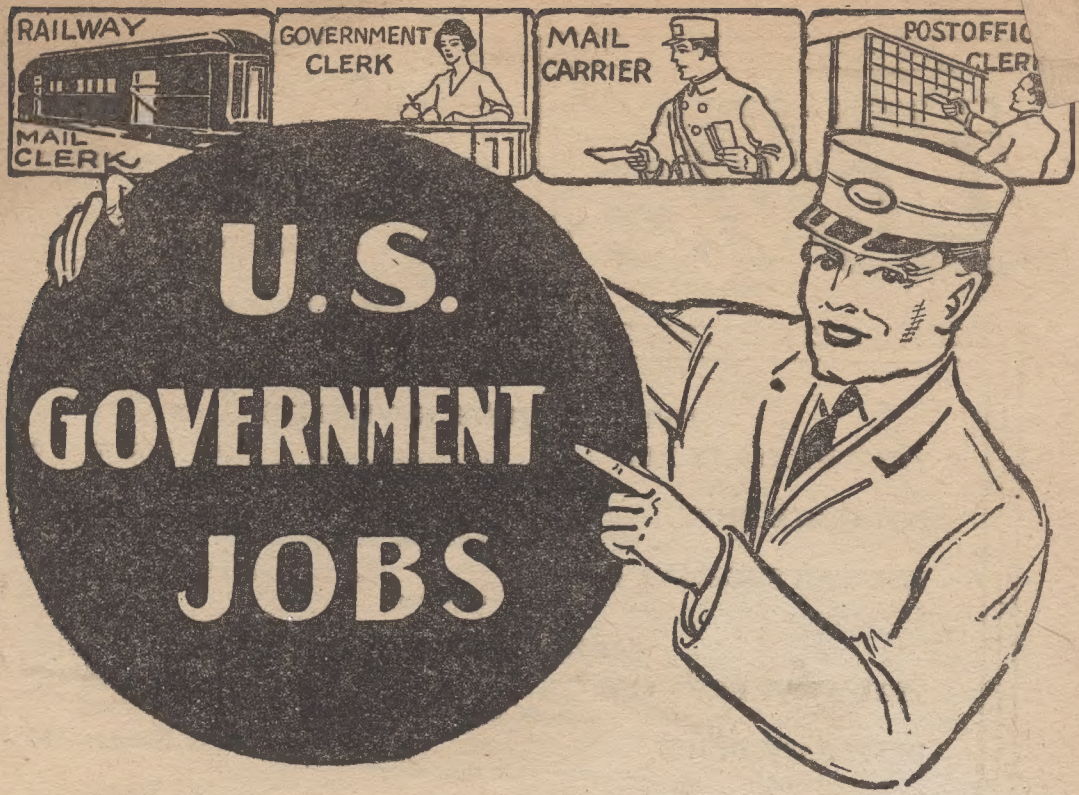

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Edited by
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VOLUME IX NUMBER 3

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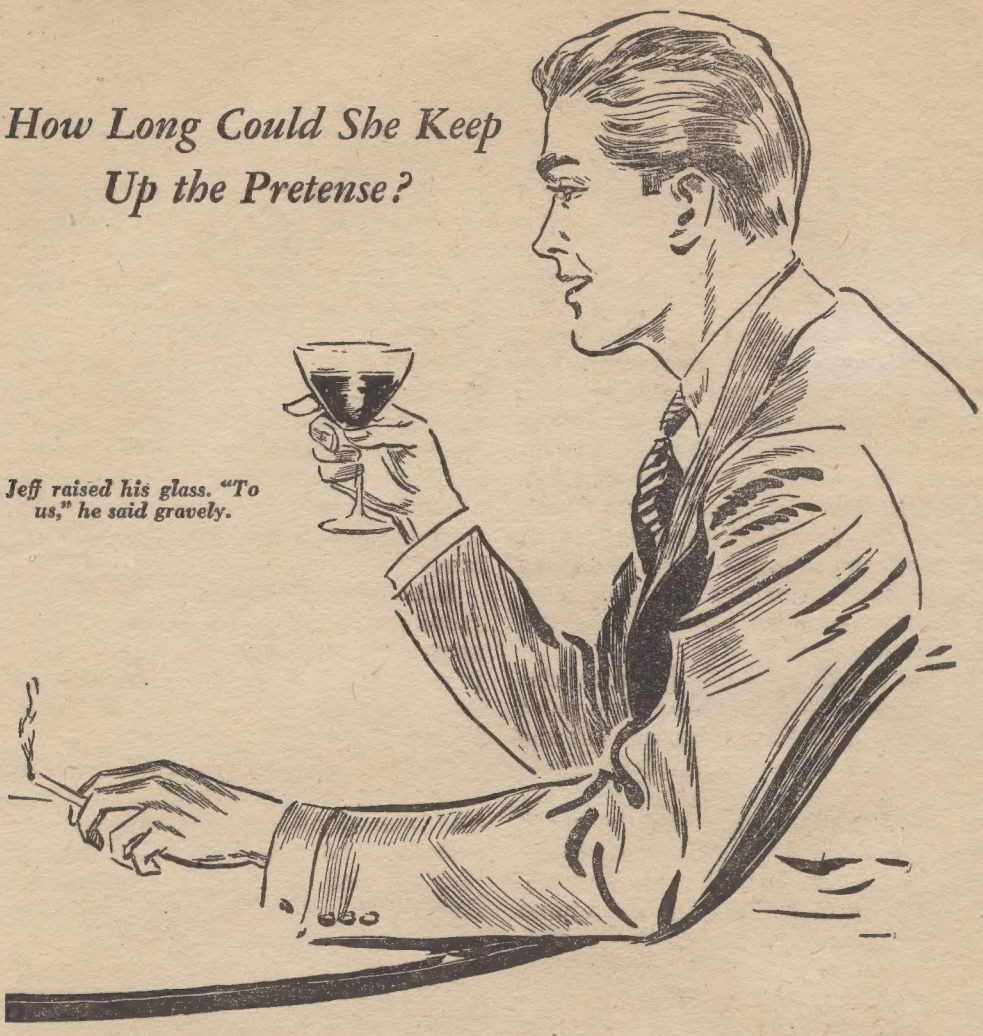


Jeff raised his glass. "To us," he said gravely.

CHAPTER I

FREDDIE STORME brought Rita home from the cocktail party. Freddie was pretty tight, and he insisted on kissing her an amorous good-by at the front door of her beautiful, tropical home which faced the broad, rolling acres of the Queen's Park Hotel. It was still quite light, but that didn't discourage Freddie one bit.

He kissed her till her mouth hurt, then he said sulkily, "I wish you wouldn't be such a chunk of ice when you're with me, Rita. Everybody in Trinidad knows you're out for a wild time. But you always freeze up like a sensitive plant with me. Why? Is it because I haven't got enough money?"

The dead thing Rita had for a heart stirred a little, resentfully. She said carelessly, "You don't select the right setting for your love-making, Freddie. You know Isobel will be watching for me."

"Oh, Isobel!" shrugged Freddie. "Who cares about her? Just because

she's your dead husband's sister doesn't make her your boss, does it?"

"Maybe it does, at that," shrugged Rita. "Who knows? Anyhow, run along home, Freddie. I'm afraid you sort of miscounted on those Planters Punches."

Freddie barred the way to the door. He sneered, "Maybe I am drunk. Maybe not. Maybe I'm just tight enough to give you a little warning. Want to hear it?"

"No," said Rita promptly. But she didn't try to push past him.

Freddie said earnestly, "You know that loan you got a week ago. You were worrying because you couldn't find out who loaned you that five thousand dollars you got through the investment company. Well, I found out. And you won't like your Santa Claus. He's about the most unpleasant man on this whole island. He's somebody you've been snubbing for ages. Now look. You give me another kiss and I'll tell you who it is!"

"Tell me first. You'll get your kiss afterwards." A frightened little pulse was beating in Rita's throat. But she didn't intend to let Freddie know that.

"It's J. Sidney Snow. That's who!" cried Freddie. "Fat, froggy old Snow that you've snubbed till he bounces. He's the one who's got the whip hand over your pretty, wicked little head. Now what are you going to do?" Then he cried resentfully, "Hey, where's my kiss?" as Rita brushed past him and went running into her house, closing the heavy, shuttered door behind her.

Isobel Fayne was standing in the hallway looking like an accusing conscience in her musty black dress.

She stared at Rita disapprovingly. She snapped, "The wages of sin is death. My brother hardly cold in his grave and you carry on like a Jezebel. Kissing men. Dancing. Making merry in a house that should be like a tomb."

Rita tugged at the gay chiffon gloves which covered her small, slim hands. She said bitterly, "This house was a tomb all those horrible years I was married to your brother! I should have left him the day after our wedding when I found out what he was like. But I didn't. I stuck to my bargain because of that bad heart of his. I stayed because you told me it might kill Luke if I left him. But you can't expect me to mourn him. And now I'm going to have some fun. You can't stop me. This is my house!"

The fact that this was an old argument did not make it any the less bitter.

Isobel said, "He left me to you with the house, didn't he? My brother had a pretty good sense of humor, knowing how you hated me, how you feared me for being God-fearing and decent, all the things you are not. You can't turn me out or you lose your inheritance!"

Rita crossed the wide tile-floored room and went up the stairs without answering. She was shaking a little, just as she always did after one of these horrible encounters with Isobel Fayne.

Melissa was mending the party frock Rita had worn the night before. She was a pleasant, brown-skinned woman, who managed Rita's house. She did not like Isobel. She adored Rita.

"Was the cocktail party nice, Miss Rita?" she asked, biting off a thread

Rita didn't answer. She picked up the dress. "You mend things so beautifully, Melissa," she said, laying her finger softly on the silken froth of material. "You've made the frock like new again. I wish you could mend my life as well as you have this dress!"

Rita pulled off her big, floppy sun hat with one lithe motion of her wrist and tossed it onto the bed.

Melissa laid down the frock and went over to the bed and picked up the hat. "It is bad luck!" she said in her singsong Trinidadian voice that Rita loved so much.

"Oh, you and your superstitions!" Rita began undressing. "I've got to

rush, Melissa. Will you run the water in the tub? I've only half an hour till the Sampson dinner."

Melissa nodded her smoothly coiffed black head. She hesitated. Then she said worriedly, "Mr. J. Sidney Snow telephoned. He wished you to call him. Here is the number."

RITA took the card Melissa was handing her. She bit her lip in indecision, then she gave that familiar shrug, slipped into a slinky, pink chiffon lounging robe and went out to the telephone in the hall.

J. Sidney Snow wanted her to come to dinner. He was very suave about it all, but it sounded like a command to Rita. She thought idly how much his voice sounded like himself. Fat, white-faced, thick-lipped, avid-eyed.

"Sorry. I'm going to the Sampson's," murmured Rita into the telephone. "Some other time, perhaps."

"It might be rather important to you if you came to my dinner party tonight, Mrs. Fayne," he purred meaningly. "Something has come up that I wish to discuss with you."

Rita liked to bring things out into the open. "You want to discuss that loan I got, perhaps," she said. "I just heard that you put up the money. I wouldn't have taken it if I'd known it came from you."

"Oh, yes, you would, my dear. Beautiful, gay women like you must have money. Of course they do. Don't get angry because I said that. Everything in this world has a price tag on it."

Rita said quietly, "Are you putting me on the auction block at your little dinner party tonight?"

"Oh, you've been doing that yourself, Mrs. Fayne! Putting yourself on the auction block ever since the day after your husband's funeral. You didn't waste much time, did you? Selling yourself to the man who could give you the gayest time! Not that I blame you. Far from it. But when people spend a great deal of money, they have to pay one way or another. So you will come to my little dinner party tonight, won't you?"

"Yes," said Rita. She always faced things. She never put off facing ugliness.

With a grave face, she went back to the bedroom. Melissa had laid out her fluffy red net dancing frock that had a provocative sheer white shirtwaist blouse and a tremendous lot of swirling skirt.

"I'm not sure I feel like wearing the red dress tonight," she began. "Perhaps the black lace—" Then she laughed. "No. The condemned man always eats a hearty breakfast, doesn't he?" And she went off to take her bath, while Melissa looked after her worriedly.

Half an hour later, Rita was ready. She sat in front of the mirror and smoothed down her satin-black hair with her slim, red-tipped fingers. She fluffed out the frothy crimson net skirt of her alluring dress and pirouetted in front of the full-length mirror.

She said to her reflection, "I've got to gold-dig those notes I signed before J. Sidney Snow forecloses the mortgage on the old homestead. I look pretty well equipped to do just that!"

Isobel came to the door and looked in just in time to hear. "My poor, poor brother! He left you five thousand dollars a year income for life, and this house which is entailed and which you cannot sell nor put up for collateral. You spent the first five thousand dollars in record time. On luxuries. Satins to make you alluring. Perfumes. Parties—"

"And a good time," cut in Rita in a harsh tone. "Something I'd thought had gone out of circulation in the five long years your brother Luke kept me penned up in this house, nursing him, shut away from people and happiness and the sunlight of love. Plants die when you shut them away from the light. People do, too, sometimes!"

Her voice broke. She was afraid she was going to give way and cry

in front of her grim, disapproving sister-in-law.

"Telephone my regrets to the Sampsons," she told Melissa, and went downstairs.

Someone was ringing the doorbell. She opened the shuttered door and said, "I thought that would be you, Mr. Snow. I'm quite ready, as you can see."

J. Sidney grasped Rita's arm in his hot, moist hand.

Isobel spoke from the stairs. "No good will come of this dancing on my brother's grave. Only evil."

J. Sidney hurried Rita out of the house. "Whew!" he said. "She's a mean piece of work, isn't she? I don't like being cursed. Why don't you put her out?"

"I can't," said Rita demurely, with downcast eyes. "Luke willed her to me."

"I'd find a way to get rid of her if I had my way!" he said, wiping his face with the back of his hand.

J. Sidney had an expensive car. They got to the country club in no time at all. J. Sidney put his arms around her. He murmured things in her ears. He kissed her. Rita concentrated on thinking about something else so his kisses wouldn't touch her. She was used to doing that. She had been married for five years to Luke Fayne and she'd had an education in being made love to by someone who disgusted her.

"Why did you lend me that five thousand dollars?" she asked as they neared the country club.

"Because you wouldn't give me a tumble. People were beginning to laugh at me because you gave me the go-by and went out with everybody else. So I bought you." His tone was smug.

"I see." Rita was wiping her lips with the handmade lace handkerchief that had been one of her luxury buys. She didn't try to hide the fact that she was wiping off his kisses.

He pulled a paper out of the pocket of his coat. He waved it in front of her. "Here's the note I hold," he said, jerking it out of her reach.

Rita shrugged. "So what? I've been thinking this thing over. I've decided I was hasty in coming out with you. I think you'll have to find another club to hold over my head, because this one won't work. You can't attach the house. Luke saw to that. He put it out of the reach of anyone because it's held in trust for me. There isn't any debtors' prison on this island. If you take away my dresses I won't cry. I've worn them all, anyhow. So—" She smiled at him triumphantly.

"YOU'VE forgotten one thing," J. Sidney said, rolling the words smoothly on his tongue. "Red Snapper! The horse you love more than anything else in this world. If you don't meet this note I can attach Red Snapper. And you know my reputation with race horses. I run 'em till they drop in their tracks. I don't like animals. So I think you'd better have that little chat about this note of yours I hold. Don't you think so?"

Rita shrank back into the silken protection of her hood so he wouldn't see the stricken whiteness of her face. "I can hardly wait for that cheery little chat," she murmured. "Why not now?"

"Because I want everybody to see that you're having dinner with me, first," said J. Sidney bluntly. "I don't like innuendoes and snickers. Everybody's had a whirl with the Merry Widow. Except me."

"Of course," said Rita.

The country club was lovely. It was all a gigantic veranda open on four sides. The magic of a tropic night drifted in unhampered by man-made walls.

Rita breathed deep of the night air and thought about Red Snapper's trusting eyes and how she'd raised him from a colt, and she made a resolution that she'd shoot him before she'd let him fall into J. Sidney's pudgy hands.

J. Sidney had the best table in the

place. There was a view of the tropical garden brilliant with reds and palm green and purples. There was a glimpse of a star-studded deep-blue sky and a small silver-crescent moon.

Rita felt the faint stirrings of romance in her heart. Her heart which had been dead so long. When she'd married Luke, at seventeen, she'd thought she loved him. What a laugh! Love—and Luke!

CHAPTER II

THERE were ten in J. Sidney's party and they were all fringe-of-things people. The girls were all too painted and too hard-faced, and they laughed too loudly at nothing. The men had that too immaculate look that made them resemble tailor's dummies.

Rita ate the hors-d'oeuvres and toyed with the fish and the inevitable cold chicken. She danced dutifully with J. Sidney. She loved the rumba orchestra. Roy Rollock was at his best. But dancing with J. Sidney was like being embraced by a feather pillow.

As the ices were being brought in, she slipped away and went into the bar and sat moodily alone at a table, thinking things over.

Luke Fayne, forty, puritanical, too amorous in private, stingy to a fault, bad-tempered, had taken her seventeen-year-old life and turned it into a shambles. How different he turned out to be from the kind-hearted man she thought she was marrying!

Now Luke was dead. Rita was getting her revenge on Luke by throwing away his money. By using Luke's money to buy herself a hilarious time.

Only, things weren't turning out as she had expected. She had the freedom she had yearned for. She had the seductive clothes and the money Luke had denied her. And it all had been so much dust and ashes.

She'd traded her reputation and her good name for the three mad months of hectic gaiety she'd had since Luke died.

"Sap!" muttered Rita to her reflection in the wall mirror.

"How did you guess?" demanded a nice voice. "Is it written on my face?"

Rita swung about hastily. "Oh, I didn't mean you. I was talking to myself." She saw he was just her type. Big and blond and very blue-eyed, with a strong chin and whimsical mouth. His eyes were distinctly approving as he looked at her.

"Let's talk this over," he suggested. "What were you drinking?" He gave her another keen glance. "Or did you come into the bar just to run away from someone?"

That was too near the truth for comfort. "The club special," murmured Rita, thinking to herself that he had the best shoulders she had seen in ages. And there was something about him that made her pulses thud and a breathless excitement grip her.

"Two club specials," he said to the hovering waiter. "And make the lady's weak."

"Well, I never!" gasped Rita.

"I don't know your alcoholic capacity," explained the man, grinning down at her. "Besides, you look like the sort of girl who ought to be taken care of. Protected. Shielded."

"Oh!" said Rita, wishing she could think of some smart wisecrack. Her mind was a blank.

"I'm Jeff Denver. News-camera man. Got in an hour ago on the clipper. Aged twenty-six. Unmarried. Unattached. Gentle unless aroused. Then take care. Fond of animals and children. How's that for a thumb-nail sketch, gorgeous? Does it give you the general idea?"

He smiled into her eyes and Rita felt as if she were drowning.

Without even knowing she did so, she took out her handkerchief and

wiped her mouth again as if to wipe off J. Sidney's kisses forever.

The drinks came. Jeff raised his glass. "To us," he said gravely.

They drank. Rita felt such a choking sensation of excitement throbbing in her throat that she could hardly swallow.

He went on, "Queer thing. I always knew if it ever happened to me I'd know it right away. I always knew it would hit me, bang, straight between the eyes. And it has. I'm groggy just looking at you. I'm all choked up sitting here beside you. Has anything hit you, too? Or do you think I'm crazy?" His eyes were black with the intensity of his feelings.

Rita clutched the edge of the table. She wasn't the notorious Mrs. Fayne in that moment. She was a shy girl, self-conscious and tremulous with awakening love.

JUST then she saw the tubby figure of J. Sidney coming into the bar. "Oh!" she whispered, and like a flash she dodged around behind the bar and into the garden.

Jeff was right at her heels. "If that fat, waddling sea lion in the white evening clothes was chasing you, I don't blame you for the duck-out," he chuckled. "He could frighten small children at night! How come a swell girl like you knows a heel like that?"

"A mistake," said Rita, trying to smile.

"How about making the getaway complete?" he asked her eagerly. "I've hired a car and driver to take me around during my stay in Port-of-Spain."

"A complete getaway!" murmured Rita, looking up at him.

He took that for assent and grabbed her arm and hurried her to the place where all the cars were parked.

The touch of his hard, firm fingers on her arm was oddly disquieting. She had thought emotion was dead in her.

Now, suddenly, because she had met this man, everything was different. She looked back on the hectic gaiety of the last three months with the detachment of a person remembering a play recently viewed. Not a very nice play!

She gave a fleeting thought to her expensive taffeta coat with the red-lined hood flung over a chair at J. Sidney's table. She wondered what J. Sidney would say and do and didn't particularly care. Except for Red Snapper's sake. She'd have to figure out something on that angle.

He helped her into his car. He smiled at her. "Fun, running away from things, isn't it?" he asked her. She nodded.

As they drove along the picturesque, winding road which fringed the moonlit sea, she began to understand why she had been so bitterly unsatisfied and unhappy. She had been looking for happiness in the wrong places, with the wrong people.

She stared at the tall, graceful coco palms etched sharply against sky and sea. She waited for Jeff Denver to kiss her. She could hardly wait to feel his firm, strong lips on hers.

But he didn't try to make love to her. He just sat there, companionably close, and talked. All at once, the tension which had kept Rita's nerves taut like a stretched wire disappeared. She felt peaceful and purring and absolutely at ease. She cuddled down more comfortably in the seat. She looked at the sky and the sea and the hibiscus hedges. She murmured, "You're a funny sort of fellow," and wasn't even aware that she had spoken her thought aloud.

He was telling some of his experiences in Europe, getting war-zone pictures. His voice seemed to come from a long way off. It was terribly soothing. Rita's eyes began to feel as if they had weights on them. Her head nodded. She drifted easily into sleep, profound and marvelous.

It was a long time later that she woke, feeling more rested than she had at any time since Luke Fayne's death. She opened her eyes slowly,

languidly. The car was standing still. The driver was gone. They were up on the top of Lady Chancellor Road. Jeff's arms were around her and he was pillowing her head on his shoulder.

Reluctantly, she drew out of the warm circle of his arms. She said, "I'm so sorry. What must you think of me? Have—have I been asleep long?"

He looked down at her. She could see how warmly sweet were his eyes in the moonglow. "It was heaven having you in my arms, asleep so trustfully," he said huskily.

Rita tried to laugh. "You told me that you adored children and animals," she whispered. "Not that I'm a child. Twenty-three is plenty old enough to know better than to go to sleep in a strange man's arms."

"I'm not a stranger," Jeff told her quietly. His firm mouth was very grave. She could see that in the white sheen of moonlight which glinted across his face. "I'm your very oldest and dearest friend. Remember?"

"Yes," whispered Rita with a little catch in her voice. "Yes. I remember."

He didn't kiss her even then. That both pleased and disappointed her.

He said gravely, "I made a bet with myself a long time ago. A serious wager. I told myself that if ever I found the girl of my dreams, my ideal, I'd ask her then and there to be my wife. But now that the miracle has really happened to me, I'm afraid to put my chances to the test. I thought I wasn't afraid of anything in this world. But I'm finding out I'm a coward, after all."

Rita thought, "He won't love me any more if he knows I'm Rita Fayne, the Merry Widow. But he doesn't know tonight. I can have that much."

It was tempting. It was the sort of thing the Merry Widow would have snatched with both greedy, sensation-seeking hands. But Rita wasn't the Merry Widow any longer. She was someone quite different. Someone much nicer.

"I think we'd better go back to Port-of-Spain," she whispered. "If you still feel the same way about me tomorrow, in the sunlight, you can—can ask me the same question and I'll—answer."

HE took both her hands in his. A pulsing current seemed to throb from him to her through the magic of his grip on her fingers. He bent and kissed her hands, one after the other, with the reverence and romantic grace of a cavalier of old.

He whispered, "Until tomorrow in the sunlight."

The driver, small, black-faced, pink-shirted and straw-hatted, came out of the underbrush where he had been napping. "You wish to go back to Port-of-Spain?" he singsonged in the Trinidadian, which didn't sound at all like English.

Jeff said reluctantly, "Yes, I suppose we must go."

Rita was in a panic all the way down the curving road lined with bamboo and mango trees and ceibas. She didn't want to tell Jeff she was Rita Fayne.

Unwittingly, Jeff gave her an idea. He said, "I know you're not stopping at the Sands Hotel. I've only been there long enough to leave my luggage and change into fresh clothes myself. But I've an idea I would have known had you been under the same roof with me."

Jeff obviously had taken her for a tourist like himself. Why not go on letting him think so?

"No," said Rita slowly. "I'm at the Queen's Park Hotel."

Jeff looked at her. "I've got just five days in Trinidad," he murmured. "It was simply by chance that I came down in the first place. My boss is Randall Near, the millionaire. He owns practically all the stock in the newsreel firm I grind for. His only crazy spot is horses. He shipped his famous race horse, Ravensboy, down last week. He's got him entered in one

race on each of the three days of racing. The three-twenty."

"Yes," said Rita bleakly. "Yes, I know."

The horse she loved so well, her horse, was going to race against Ravensboy! It seemed like Fate, an unkind Fate, that this should be so.

Ravensboy was the favorite. The horse everyone said couldn't be beat. And Rita's only hope to outwit J. Sidney and save Red Snapper was to win the race and pay J. Sidney back with the purse money. And now, it turned out that he was owned by Jeff's boss. It was ironic!

"Will you be at the races tomorrow?" she asked.

"Of course," he nodded. "I've got to take a lot of race-track shots."

"Race-tracking," corrected Rita idly, without thinking. "Haven't you noticed how we always put an 'ing' on the ending of words down here? Sparking plugs instead of spark plugs, and rowing boat instead of row boat." She stopped, aghast at the giveaway. She wasn't talking at all like a casual tourist!

Jeff didn't seem to notice. He said, "I've heard there's a grand place to swim a few miles out. Spot called Macaripe Bay. How about a swim tomorrow morning?" He added meaningly, "There'll be sunlight then!"

Rita felt her cheeks flush crimson. She hadn't known she could blush. It was as if life were starting all over again for her. As if there had been no Luke with his money so carefully tied up so his widow couldn't get it all at once, no hectic period of trying to catch up with the life she had lost.

"I'd love to go," she said huskily.

Rita got out quickly at the Queen's Park Hotel, after a hasty look around to see if anyone she knew was there.

Jeff lingered, obviously reluctant to leave.

"Do you know you haven't told me your name," he smiled.

Rita gasped. Her mind seemed to stop still. Finally she said, "Call me what you did at first," she said, finally. "Gorgeous!"

He looked so crestfallen that she added immediately, "I promise I'll tell you my name tomorrow. It's just a game. Don't you see?"

He took her hand in both of his. He said quietly, "This has been the happiest evening of my life. I'll remember it always. Till tomorrow then." He got back into the car and drove off.

Rita waited till he was out of sight, then she called a car and drove to the palatial home facing the savannah. The home which still belonged to Luke even though he was dead!

Isobel Fayne met her at the doorway. "Mr. Snow has called up repeatedly," she said. "No one can get any sleep in this house, it seems." She had her tall, spare figure wrapped in a black dressing gown.

The phone shrilled. "There he is again," she said disapprovingly.

Rita hated to answer but she did. J. Sidney said, "What happened to you, Rita? I've been worried about you." Under the suave notes of his voice was sullen fury.

Rita hesitated, then she let him have it. "I was bored," she said casually. "I never stay at parties when I'm bored. You shouldn't have forced me to go out with you. I hope you won't try to make the same mistake again." She spoke quite calmly and her voice didn't sound as frightened as she felt.

J. Sidney, for all he was fat and rather funny, was dangerous, too. He was the fifth richest man on the island. Money is always synonymous with power.

"I still hold your note for five thousand dollars," he reminded her. "I think you'd better go with me to the race tracking tomorrow. If you're very nice to me, I may forget your behavior tonight. If you don't go, I'll attach your horse immediately. And if I get that horse, I'll make him sorry he was ever foaled. I hate to go to

these lengths, but you make it necessary."

Rita tried to think of something to say. There wasn't anything.

She felt the force of that silence, and shivered. Some of the stories that drifted around Trinidad about J. Sidney's ruthlessness and cruelty came to her mind frighteningly.

At last he whispered insinuatingly, "Your cloak! You forgot your evening wrap. Suppose I return it—tonight? Then we could have our—little chat, and if everything was quite satisfactory, I might give you back your note—" His voice trailed away.

She clenched her fingers around the telephone. "I'm afraid you might wake my sister-in-law," she said. "Isobel is such a light sleeper. You may return the cloak tomorrow." She put the telephone down quickly, as if it had burned her hand.

CHAPTER III

HE was up at five the next morning. Wearing a cool, lettuce-green linen dress and a broad-brimmed white hat, she walked across the wide road which fronted her house and entered the turnstyle entrance which led to the broad, rolling acres of the savannah where the races were to take place that afternoon.

"Early mornings in the tropics are the nicest time of all," she thought, breathing deep of the smell of green growing things in the air and the hint of warmth to come.

She paused for a moment to watch the Negro trainers exercising the sleek race horses on the green turf track.

"Sunbeam" Smith, who had ridden for Luke and who was going to carry her colors, was on Red Snapper. She beckoned. Sunbeam slid off Red Snapper's sorrel back and put a blanket over him and began rubbing him down. Red Snapper nuzzled Rita's hand adoringly and rubbed his head against her arm.

"Has Red Snapper any chance, Sunbeam?" she asked anxiously.

Sunbeam shook his black head. "'Fraid not, Miss Rita. That Ravensboy is too fast for us, I'm afraid. But if it rained, we might have a chance."

"Gorgeous!" cried a delighted voice. "You!"

She whirled around. It was Jeff.

"Hold it!" he cried, jerking out his camera. "That's a swell shot."

The sudden action terrified Red Snapper. He lunged dangerously, but Rita caught his rein and said, soothingly, "Steady, boy! Steady!" and he quieted immediately. He put his nose into her hand and breathed noisily.

Rita patted his heaving satiny flanks and turned towards Jeff. "You frightened him," she smiled, and realized that Jeff had been grinding for all he was worth.

"Best picture I've ever taken!" he told her and his eyes glowed.

Sunbeam said, "I'd better be taking him to the stables."

"Yes," said Rita hurriedly. "Take him along."

Jeff took a few feet of film depicting Sunbeam and the horse departing.

And then two harsh voices intruded into the early morning paradise. Rita recognized them as belonging to two bookmakers come to look the situation over. One said, "Red Snapper hasn't a chance against Ravensboy. Unless it rains."

"Who owns Red Snapper?" chimed in the other.

"Don't you know? The Merry Widow is what the island people call her. That good-looking number, Mrs. Luke Fayne. I wouldn't mind meeting her in the moonlight some night myself!"

Both men snickered knowingly.

A cold hand clutched Rita's heart. She stammered, "Let's stroll across the savannah. You might like some pictures of the ceiba trees."

Jeff murmured as they strolled

along, "Funny how coincidences happen! You know that woman those men were talking about? This Mrs. Luke Fayne? Well, I met a chap in the hotel last night. He was moaning because this same notorious female stood him up! He was supposed to take her to a dinner party and her maid canceled things at the last minute. He was putting up an awful howl over the stand-up, but I told him it was a good thing. He seemed a nice boy. Pity to have him get entangled with a woman like that."

Rita's face was livid. "Maybe she's not as bad as they think," she began slowly.

"It's like you to stand up for her," said Jeff warmly. "But I'm sure she isn't worth it!"

Rita's sandal-shod feet stumbled a little.

Instantly, Jeff's hand was on her arm, steadying her. He said huskily, "It's sunlight now, gorgeous! No moon magic to cast a spell. And I feel just the same about you. Only—more so. Gorgeous, will you marry me?"

His arms closed around her. They were alone in the tropic beauty of the green savannah, with tropical trees all around and the glory of the green hills in the background. Tiny hummingbirds dipped and whirred through the air. The moment was filled with throbbing emotion.

Jeff's kiss was a tumultuous thing. It set off madness in Rita. Her lips warmed under his.

"Darling," he whispered. "Darling!"

Kisses had never meant much to Rita. So many people had kissed her. And she hadn't been stirred at all. But this kiss was different. This kiss woke her to the full meaning of love.

"Fly back with me to the States, on Thursday, and we'll be married in New Orleans," Jeff was whispering, his lips still held lightly on hers.

Rita trembled. She hesitated. "Yes," she whispered defiantly. "Yes, Jeff, I will!"

She was thinking, "I'll run away from Trinidad with Jeff. I'll leave Luke's house and Luke's money and the reputation I've made for myself. I'll leave it all behind me and make the best wife for Jeff that a man ever had. I'll make it up to him for not telling him. I will!"

THESE thoughts hardly had time to drift through her mind before Jeff was kissing her again. Her betrothal kiss. A kiss that made the world stand still.

He drew away from her after that. He leaned against a tree and took out a cigarette with hands that shook a little. He lighted a cigarette for her and put it between her lips.

"Dynamite, isn't it, gorgeous?" he said, fighting for lightness. "We'd better leave our love-making till after we're married. It'll be safer!"

Rita said, "My name is Rita Post."

That was her maiden name. She was fighting now to keep Jeff from knowing that she was Rita Fayne, the Merry Widow.

"You'll always be gorgeous to me," murmured Jeff.

For an hour Jeff and Rita wandered about the savannah, getting pictures of the graceful trees and the interesting vistas. And, at the same time, getting acquainted. Their minds fitted just as their lips had done.

It seemed that he, too, shared her love of horses. He liked the same books she did. More than ever, Rita felt that they were old and tried friends, as well as sweethearts.

They had breakfast at the Sands Hotel. It was terribly exciting and intimate to sit opposite each other at the cosy little table for two. She thrilled to the fact that he wanted her to pour his coffee. They lingered a long time over that meal, and Rita was happier than she had ever been in her life.

It wasn't until Jeff drove her to the Queen's Park Hotel and waited for her on the broad veranda while she went upstairs to get her bathing suit, that she began to realize just

exactly what she had let herself in for.

Of course she hadn't any bathing suit at the Queen's Park! And unfortunately there was only the one main exit out of the hotel. She went along the well-known corridor, wondering what in the world she was going to do.

She knew the Queen's Park well. She and Luke had spent their honeymoon here. The doors and the tops of the rooms were all carved scrollwork which made for coolness. It also allowed people in the rooms to hear everything that was going on in the halls.

But Rita wasn't thinking of that when she saw Celestine. Celestine used to work for Rita, along with her sister, Melissa. But she had spilled Luke's coffee one morning and he had discharged her in a rage, without a reference. Rita cautiously had taken the tearful girl over to the Queen's Park Hotel and insisted that she be given a job. Celestine had always been grateful.

Now Rita cried, "Celestine, I'm in an awful jam. I've told someone I live here. I don't want him to find out who I am, really, or where I live. Will you race home and tell Melissa to give you my green-and-white polka-dot bathing suit? The satin one, you know. And the green cap and green bath shoes. Hurry, please. Bring them to me here. I'll wait."

Celestine looked up and down the empty hall. "I'll hurry, Miss Rita," she said. "You'll get me out of trouble if they find out I've gone, won't you?"

"Of course. Of course. But do hurry!" Rita gave her a push to start her on her way.

The door to the suite opposite opened just after Celestine had gone and while Rita was standing there irresolute. A beautiful girl came out. A girl with silver-gilt hair, enormous blue eyes, a lush, provocative mouth and a figure set off beautifully by a white sports outfit.

The girl looked at Rita insolently, and then went slowly down the old-fashioned broad stairs that led to the main floor.

Rita gasped a little. That girl must have heard what she said to Celestine. That was why she had looked at her so curiously. Rita tried to remember exactly what she had said, but couldn't. She bit her lips in indecision.

It seemed a terribly long time before Celestine came back. She had all the bathing togs in a red-and-green string bag. She had added another touch. She had brought a small white turban. As she took Rita's big hat she chuckled, "Now he'll be sure you changed your things, Miss Rita." She was beaming with delight in being in the midst of an intrigue. She thought Rita was wonderful!

Rita jammed on the white hat any which way and grabbed the string bag. She thanked Celestine and went racing down the stairs, her heart beating fast.

From the doorway she could see Jeff seated at a little green table, enjoying a tall, cool-looking drink. As she came closer, her vision of the veranda widened, and she saw with a gasp of horror that the silver-gilt haired beauty was sitting with Jeff, sipping the same kind of drink.

RITA stopped still, not knowing what to do. But Jeff somehow sensed her presence. He jumped to his feet. He cried, "Rita!" It was the first time he had called her by her name, and it seemed an omen.

Rita drew a quick, sharp breath that rasped her throat, and came slowly forward.

Jeff said, "This is Gloria Near, Randall Near's daughter. She's the real owner of Ravensboy. She just flew in this morning."

"Hello," said Gloria carelessly. She went right on talking to Jeff as if Rita hadn't been there. "Now look, Jeff darling. Dad's going to be angry if you don't beau his daughter around, once she's come all this long way to see her horse race!" There was a

subtle menace in her voice. "I want you to take me right over to see Ravensboy. Then you and I are going exploring. I know you may have made dates with people before I came, but you can break them." She shrugged a little and her eyes flicked Rita scornfully.

Jeff said quietly, "You've pulled this possessive stunt a lot of times, Gloria. And I let you get away with it when it didn't matter, because I wanted to keep my job, and you can twist your dad around your little finger. Both you and I know it. But this time it isn't working. Because this time, it's different! Gloria, this is the girl I'm going to marry, Rita Post."

At the same time he drew Rita close, and his hand fumbled something onto her engagement finger.

Gloria's lovely face twisted with fury. She said, "I'm tired and I'm in no mood for jokes, Jeff Denver. You know perfectly well that Dad expects us to get married. In fact, when and if I tell him that you're even so much as looking at another girl, he'll fire you—like that!" She snapped her slim, nervous fingers explosively.

"You'd better tell him and get it over with then," said Jeff, pulling Rita's left hand onto the table, "because you see it's all settled. Ring on finger and everything!"

"Oh!" Gloria flounced out of the room.

"Probably racing to make a long-distance call," grinned Jeff. "Come along, gorgeous. I've got a car waiting."

But some of the beauty had gone out of the day for Rita.

"That was my mother's ring," said Jeff, putting an arm around her as he drove. "I hope you like it, dear. If you don't—"

Rita nestled the ring against the warmth of her lips. "I love it!" she whispered. Then, troubledly, "That girl—" she began. "Can she really make trouble for you?"

"Plenty." He nodded nonchalantly. "And who cares? I'm tops in my job. I can get another place in a jiffy. So why worry?"

He rubbed his cheek against hers. "Jealous, gorgeous? If you are, forget it. She's plenty beautiful and she's got lots of oomph. But she's the type I don't go for. She's the reason I hate excitement-eaters and thrill-hunters. I've seen enough of Gloria, in the three years I've been grinding for Near, to make me sick!"

WHEN Rita had put on her lovely white bathing suit, she came out of her bathing cubicle and looked around for Jeff. He wasn't out yet. But somebody else was. J. Sidney Snow.

He smiled at her. He said, "Rita, I've been hearing things about you and this newsreel camera man. Do you think it's wise to go around with a stranger so much?"

Rita looked at him levelly. "Who elected you my guardian?" she muttered disdainfully. She drew a deep breath and went on, "And I've come to a decision. I'll pay your note in cash. Not in any other tender. So it isn't any use your trailing around after me, or annoying me any longer. You're out!"

She saw Jeff coming out of his bath-hut. She went over to him and said, quite loudly, "I'm afraid the sharks are out today."

Jeff recognized J. Sidney. "So I see," he said unsmilingly.

Rita shrugged and said, "I know a cove where we can have a gorgeous swim. Alone. Get your clothes and we'll drive there in our bathing suits."

They had a wonderful time. The water was balmy. No one was anywhere about. Afterwards they lay and drowsed on the sun-drenched beach.

It was heaven. They were in love. They were in paradise.

Rita resolutely shut out the reckoning that was coming. She enjoyed every moment of her morning with Jeff. But back in her mind was the thought, "Isobel Fayne was right, after all. I should have known better than to try snatching good times from

life by violating the ethics of good taste. I've built up a reputation as a Merry Widow. Nobody on earth is going to believe that reputation isn't deserved. Not even Jeff. Most of all Jeff."

Jeff slid his fingers across hers. "Why so pensive, darling?" he asked her.

Rita smiled at him, pitifully. "Nothing," she whispered. "Nothing at all."

Time raced so fast when she was with Jeff. After a little while there was no time left at all. Jeff was looking at his watch. He was telling her that they must leave.

Rita hated to go. She had the awful feeling that this was the end.

As they drove back to town, she thought, "I ought to tell him now."

But she couldn't. The very thought of life without Jeff made her shiver. She drew a quick breath. She wasn't going to lose Jeff. She mustn't. Because he was life itself.

She said slowly, "Jeff, if you really love me, let's hire a plane and fly to New Orleans this afternoon. I—I have a feeling something is going to happen to us if we don't go now. Something is going to—separate us!"

He swept her into his arms. He said, "Darling, nothing is going to happen. Nothing on earth can separate us!"

She thought, "Nothing but you, darling. Nothing but you!"

"Then—you won't go, Jeff?" she said thinly.

Jeff shook his head. "I've got my job to do. I can't walk out on my assignment. The old man sent me down here to take pictures of his horse. After the races are over, we'll scram at once."

Rita nodded fatalistically. After all, she couldn't run away from her past. She'd have to tell Jeff. It wouldn't be fair not to tell him.

Jeff was saying, "There's a plane out of Port-of-Spain at eight tonight. We'll take that. Get packed up, and if anything happens and we get separated or held up in any way, we'll meet at the seaplane base at seven-thirty. Right?"

"Of course," said Rita dully.

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN one o'clock and two - thirty, when the first race was due to start, Rita put in the busiest moments she had ever known. She collected all her jewelry and all her evening dresses but the one she had worn the night she met Jeff. She sold the jewelry for five hundred dollars and she got another two hundred for the dresses. With the thousand dollars she had left on hand in the bank, that made seventeen hundred. A far cry from five thousand.

She tried to borrow from the bank. The bank president was Freddie Storme's father. He thought she'd been leading his son astray. He loved refusing her request.

So did the manager of the Queen's Park Hotel, where she had given so many luxurious, expensive parties.

And the owner of the dry-goods store who had imported all those lovely, luxurious dresses for her.

All of them refused her request, gloatingly, as if they liked seeing her in a jam.

Finally, when there was nothing else left, she went to Isobel.

She humbled herself to ask Isobel for a loan. Isobel, who had so much money and never spent any of it.

Isobel smiled for the first time since her brother's death. She smoothed the black cotton skirt of her mourning dress. "Why come to me?" she asked. "You've never taken my advice. You've laughed at me. You've flouted good taste. You've got yourself talked about all up and down this island as a notorious woman. You did all that. Not me. I tried to stop you. But you

wouldn't listen. So why come to me now?"

Rita clenched her small hands at her sides. "I wouldn't have come to you if there'd been anyone else," she told her directly. "You know how I love Red Snapper. Mr. Snow will claim him if I don't get the money to take up that note. You see, it isn't for myself I'm asking this."

"You spent nine thousand dollars in three months. Nine thousand dollars in riotous living! I've told you before that the wages of sin is death. I've pointed out to you that as you sow, so shall ye reap! Now you're beginning to find out that my words were true. Now my dear dead brother's name is beginning to be vindicated."

They were sitting on the wide, screened-in front porch that was hidden from the garden and the road by thick creepers and vines. The honeysuckles were in bloom. The perfume was almost overpowering.

Rita had smelled honeysuckle blossoms that night on Lady Chancellor Road. She bit her lips and tasted the salt of blood in her mouth.

"Five thousand dollars of my dead brother's money you squandered on sinful pleasures. Then you borrowed more. You don't think I'm going to cry because you have to make payment, do you?"

She looked at Rita with glowing, triumphant eyes, taking in the beauty and the loveliness of the girl she had always hated, gloating over her humiliation and defeat.

Isobel shrugged. "It ought not to be hard for a notorious woman like you to get money," she snapped. "Get it from one of your men. Get it the easy way!"

"Yes, why don't you take the easiest way, Mrs. Fayne!" chimed in a harsh, furious voice.

The screen door pushed open. Jeff stood there. Jeff, with all the life and joy crushed out of him. Jeff, white-faced and furious and disillusioned.

Rita stood there like a statue of a woman, hardly breathing in her misery, feeling her heart twist cruelly in her breast.

Jeff said, "If you wanted to play me for a sucker, you shouldn't have gone all over town trying to raise money. It left a trail a mile wide. It tipped me off. I know now why you were so keen to get out of town. So you wouldn't have to pay J. Sidney Snow his pound of flesh. Well, I certainly am glad you draw the line somewhere! It's good to know that the woman you thought was pure as driven snow has a small remnant of morals left. Or was it just because J. Sidney is fat that you didn't like him?"

Rita's hand stole to her aching throat. She gasped, "He'll take Red Snapper. He—he beats horses. Gets a sort of pleasure out of torturing them. That's why I had to pay him his money. So Red Snapper wouldn't—"

Her voice trailed away. She saw he wasn't listening.

Jeff's lips curled. "I suppose every man gets entangled with a woman like you sooner or later!" His tone was like a lash. "And I thought Gloria Near was about the lowest thing that walked, but you have her beaten on every count. You have a face like an angel and clear eyes like a child. You— Oh, what's the use of talking to you? You'd never understand. You're too low! Here!" He flung a stack of bills down on the table furiously. "There's your four thousand dollars you've been begging for all over town. I'm buying back my mother's ring with that money. It's cheap to get it back at that price. Once I get the ring, I'll take it home and wash it in disinfectant."

He was talking on furiously, saying horrible things that beat against Rita's ears like small, sharp whips.

Fury surged over her. She snatched off the ring and held it out to him. She cried, "Take your ring, Mr. Jeff Denver! You know everything. You know all the answers. You have it all doped out. All right then. I'll take

your money! It's a cheap price to pay for the heart that you're tearing out of me. It's a low figure to pay for the love you've stamped on. The cleanest, finest thing that ever came into my life! I'll take your money. You've got your ring. And now—get out!" She screamed the words at him like a fishwife.

FOR an instant he stared at her contemptuously. "Your play acting doesn't get anywhere with me, Mrs. Fayne!" he said. He took the ring and thrust it into his vest pocket. He turned on his heel and stomped down the front steps, the screen door banging behind him with a hollow sort of finality.

Rita stood there, crouched over a little as if a terrific pain tore at her very vitals.

Isobel said, smugly, "I told you so! Now you're finding out that the wages of sin *is* death!"

Rita didn't even hear. She brushed by Isobel and went upstairs, the money clutched in her hot, damp hand.

Brown-faced Melissa was terribly sympathetic. She seemed to know all about everything, the way the natives on the island always did. She put her arms comfortingly around Rita and Rita wept on the brown girl's shoulder.

Melissa said, "You mustn't give up, Miss Rita. You've got to hold your head high. You've got to show all the folks in this town that you don't care. You've got to go to the races this afternoon and act like you haven't a care in the world!"

Rita raised a stricken face. "I—couldn't," she gasped, speaking with difficulty out of throat seemingly paralyzed by anguish.

Melissa talked on soothingly. "It's your only chance to get him back, Miss Rita!" she said as she skillfully dressed Rita in the lace frock she had mended the day before.

"He'll never speak to me again. Don't you realize, Melissa? He hates me!" cried Rita tragically.

"Hate is very close to love, Miss Rita," said Melissa, making up Rita's face so the tear marks didn't show, shadowing her eyes so the circles under them weren't so prominent. "There. Now you go along and give that money to Mr. Snow in front of everybody in the club grandstand. That will show them that you didn't sell yourself to him."

"But—Jeff's love is dead, Melissa! How can I go on living when Jeff's love is dead?"

Melissa laid her brown finger on the mended place in Rita's dress. "You said this dress was ruined and you'd never be able to wear it again. But I mended it so it didn't even show."

Rita put on her big, flopping hat. She thrust the roll of bills into her raffia purse. She said, "You're right, Melissa. I can't give up. I've got to go on fighting."

She went over to the race tracking. She went straight to the paddock and said a few encouraging words to Sunbeam. She leaned her face against Red Snapper's satiny head and whispered, "Oh, please, Red Snapper, do try to win! Try, please. For my sake. I've got to return this money to Jeff. I've got to!"

The races at Trinidad were very popular. Everybody went, from the governor of the island to the lowliest native. The crowded, roofless bleachers were crammed with the natives and townspeople. Then there were covered stands where the élite of Trinidad sat, dressed extravagantly. There was the governor's box where the governor, his family and his aides sat. He had guests today. The governor hadn't arrived yet. But Mr. Near and his daughter sat in the box, and next to Gloria, being most attentive, sat J. Sidney Snow.

Rita thought, "I can't do it! Everybody is talking about me. I can't face them!"

Her mind flashed back to the memory of the two bookies who had dis-

cussed her so slurringly. It had come with a sense of shock then that people outside her own set knew about her wild ways. She didn't mind her own crowd talking. That she had found stimulating. But to find out that her name was a byword on every cheap tout's lips had put a different complexion on things.

Rita drew a deep breath and with head held high, walked in front of everybody till she came opposite the governor's box.

Gloria raised her beautifully shaped eyebrows. "Dear me! It's that girl!" she said.

Rita paid no attention to her. She opened her purse and took out the roll of bills. She said, quite loudly and steadily, "Here, Mr. Snow, is your money. Kindly give me the note you bought from Mr. Standish."

J. Sidney goggled at the money. He took it furiously and pulled the note out of his wallet and flung it at her, muttering something ugly.

It was quite evident that he was astounded that she had the money. It had been all over town that she couldn't raise the sum.

Rita went on clearly, "Next time you try to buy a woman, Mr. Snow, be sure she wants to be bought by you! I'm very glad my horse has escaped your cruelty and that I didn't have to buy his immunity with my own self-respect!"

A ripple went over the stands. Whispers came sibilantly to her ears. By nightfall everybody would know what she had said to J. Sidney. He knew that, too. His face was apoplectically crimson.

Rita went into the padlock, walking steadily and not looking to right or left. No one looking at her would have guessed that her knees were doubling under her, and her heart was beating like crashing cymbals.

Something drew Rita's gaze like a magnet to the judges' stand. Jeff was there with his camera.

Her heart hurt so sharply that she thought she was going to faint. She remembered she must place her bets. She had to pay Jeff back immediately to regain some measure of her self-respect.

He had given her four thousand dollars. With the money she had raised already, she had a seven-hundred-dollar surplus in her bag. She bet it all on Red Snapper!

AS she came out, she looked up at the blazing sun. If it would only rain! If it did, her horse might win.

Feeling more bleak and forsaken than she had ever been in all her sad life, Rita watched the horses filing out. She couldn't focus her eyes on them very well, and the brilliant riding silks of the jockeys all blurred together so she couldn't tell them apart. Tears shut her away from everybody. Tears of mourning for the love which had died, killed by her own foolish behavior.

This morning she had been held close and safe in Jeff's dear arms. Now he was up there, a million miles away, grimly turning his camera.

She knew she was too far away for him to see her. She said aloud, "Oh, Jeff, Jeff, I'm not bad like you think I am! I was just starved for gaiety and good times. I suppose you'd never understand. No one could. Oh, Jeff, Jeff!" Tears brimmed over. She wiped them away hastily, but they still seemed to patter on the front of her frock.

Tears? No. It was rain. Tropical rain that came down abruptly in a downpour while the sun still shone brilliantly.

There was a glorious rainbow in the sky. Rita never noticed that symbol of hope. If only this rain had come half an hour ago! If only the verdant turf had been soaked through, then Red Snapper would have had a chance!

They were off!

The horses were a confused blur to Rita. The race was a mile and a half. Nearly everyone had sought shelter, driven in by the rain. Rita wasn't even

aware that her dress was soggy about her slim heels.

The horses were thundering around the far turn now with the rain pelting down on them, shutting them off from the spectators.

Rita looked back at Jeff, her heart in her eyes. She saw to her surprise that Jeff had given over the grinding of the camera to one of the judges, and he was bending forward with another camera in his hand.

Rita's eyes were straining to see which horse was out in front. It looked like a sorrel horse with a jockey wearing purple-and-gold silks!

Her hands gripped the rail excitedly.

And then she heard Gloria Near's mocking voice beside her. "Why get so worked up, Mrs. Fayne? Even if you win, you lose, if you know what I mean!"

She held up her left hand.

Rita saw with incredulous, dulled eyes, that Gloria was wearing Jeff's ring. The engagement ring that had belonged to his mother. She swayed faintly.

She turned her eyes again to the track. Dimly she saw that Ravensboy and Red Snapper were away out in front. Neck and neck they thundered along, their hoofs pounding soggily in the rain-soaked turf. Sunbeam was standing up in his stirrups, pounding against Red Snapper's sides with his heels and shrieking encouragement to the horse he adored. Ravensboy's jockey was lying on his horse, belaboring him with his whip.

There was a flash. They had crossed the finish line. The race was over. And Rita didn't know who had won! She stood there, numbed.

Gloria drifted away, her work done. The rain stopped abruptly. The sun grew warmer. People flocked back to the rails, excitedly. Rita's lace dress dried out quickly.

There was a long delay about putting up the name of the winning horse. Finally the number went up. Ravensboy!

Rita's knees sagged weakly. And then a stir in the grandstand made her look up. A protest flag was being hoisted. Something was wrong.

She dashed across the paddock and into the stands, brushing aside people as she went. She got to the judges' stand at last.

"What's the matter?" she gasped.

Mr. Heindricks said fussily, "The newsreel camera man took a quick-time exposure of the finish. He said he thought the race would be a photo-finish affair. He's in there now, developing the picture that he claims will give your horse the victory!" He took off his hat and mopped his face. "I'm sure I don't like all these new-fashioned things. Starting gates and pari-mutuel machines and now this photo-finish stuff. Eyesight was good enough to judge a race in my father's time. It ought to be good enough for me!"

Jeff came out, waving a damp bit of paper. "Red Snapper's nose went over the line first!" he yelled. "Look at this picture proving that!"

Then he saw Rita and froze up. She wanted to die.

Red Snapper's name went up as winner. Rita pulled her tickets on Red Snapper out of her purse. She thrust them into Jeff's hands and when her fingers touched his, his flinched as if he'd been burned!

She said bleakly, "Collect on those tickets and you'll get back the money you loaned me."

Jeff started to say, "I was buying back my ring. That wasn't a loan!" But Rita was stumbling down the stairs.

She led Red Snapper up to the governor's box, with a triumphant Sunbeam sitting proudly in the saddle. The governor put a horseshoe made of fragrant flowers around Red Snapper's neck. He kissed Rita's hand and handed her a bouquet. Gloria Near and her father and J. Sidney Snow looked apoplectic.

Jeff filmed the scene with as much

emotion as if he'd been grinding a coffee machine.

J. Sidney Snow's face was the color of raw beef. The governor's wife said gently, "You must come to dine with us soon, Mrs. Fayne."

Rita said, "You're awfully kind. Thank you," and made her escape.

RITA went to the seaplane base at seven-thirty! She knew she was being a fool, but she had promised to go and she went, though she knew that Gloria Near was wearing her dear ring and Jeff's heart was hot with hatred.

She waited on the landing stage. Nobody with broad shoulders and tan hair and a merry smile came.

At eight o'clock the plane for New Orleans took off. Dusk came, then darkness, shutting down swiftly. Rita stayed, sitting forlornly in the darkness on her upended suitcase, feeling desolate enough to jump into the sea.

Somebody came walking decisively along the boards which led to the landing stage. Rita's head went up with a jerk. It was Jeff! He had come. She leaped to her feet and stood there, afraid to move for fear she was dreaming this.

"Somehow, you don't look so much to me like the Merry Widow," said Jeff huskily. "You look pretty sad, if you ask me!"

Rita stammered out everything she should have said to Jeff that afternoon. She tried to explain why she had acted as she had. After a while she stopped. It just didn't make sense. Of course Jeff wouldn't understand.

Jeff said, "You might have saved your breath, Rita. I got all that when I developed the race-tracking pictures and put them on the sound track and ran them back in my projection room. That camera of mine is long range, you know. Pulls people, yards away, right up to the camera. I ground you in when you were standing at the paddock rail, Rita. I thought it was because I hated you. I don't know about that. Anyhow, I can read lips. I got what you said. I saw you cry. No make-believe stuff like Gloria pulls, either. The real McCoy!"

"But you gave her my—I mean—your mother's ring!" Rita's voice was husky with feeling.

"I didn't. I left that ring on my dresser at the hotel. She found it there when she sneaked in to see what she could find. She put it on. I had nothing to do with it."

"Oh," said Rita, her eyes beginning to shine a little.

There was a short silence.

Jeff said, "I've heard somewhere that if you ask a girl to marry you three times running, she's got to say yes. I'm asking you the third time, gorgeous. I don't care who you are or what you've done, I love you! Oh, I'll admit the world turned upside down for me when I found out who you were! I was bitter and furious enough to hate you. But that's over. Done with. I'm asking you to marry me, gorgeous!"

"Oh, Jeff!" Rita found her way into his arms. She couldn't see well she was crying so hard.

Their lips met in a kiss that had the depths of understanding and hurt and trust in it, as well as passion. A kiss that was born of heartbreak. A kiss of eternal fidelity.

They were both a little shaken when that kiss was over.

"Did—did you lose your job?" whispered Rita fearfully.

Jeff's arms tightened around her shoulders. "No. I quit! I'm doing publicity pictures for the island. We're going to stay here in your house for six months, gorgeous. To wipe out that legend you built up about that fast-living widow! We're going to show everybody that you're the grandest girl in the world. Who knows? We may even win over Isobel in time!"

"I doubt it," said Rita. But she wasn't really thinking of what she was saying. She was standing on tiptoe for another kiss from the man she loved.

All Men Said, "Stay Away from Suzy!"—But None of Them Could!

"You know," he said, "if you weren't the boss' daughter, I'd say you were kind of cute. But I'm still glad this is one job where you don't have to make up to the boss' daughter."

Stay Away from Suzy!

By Lisbeth Walter

"STAY away from Suzy—if you want to stay where you are." There wasn't a reporter working for her father's extensive chain of newspapers who hadn't heard the wisecrack. Neither was there one who, having met Suzy, didn't immediately

forget all about the excellent advice.

It wasn't her beauty that did it. By artistic standards she had no great claim to the word. Her nose was impudent, tip-tilted. Her hair was flyaway, a red-blond shade. But her eyes were a deep, breath-taking sapphire. And when she smiled—well, Suzy had plenty of proof that few young men were able to resist the temptation to smile back.

Yet "Tip" Saunders was resisting, or putting on an excellent imitation of resisting. And what was more staggering, he'd been putting on the act for ten incredible, vanity-crushing days.

"I'll wait until you finish that story, and then we can have cocktails." Suzy's tone was sweet but inexorable. "After all"—she perched herself on the edge of his desk, swung exquisitely slender legs carelessly against its side—"I'm in no hurry."

Tip continued to pound the typewriter with two furious brown fingers. He finished a sheet, ripped it out, hastily inserted another. Above the staccatto *tap-tap* of the keys, he said, "Maybe you're not in a hurry, Miss Carter, but I am. I've got a cocktail date and a dinner date and a theater date. Then I'm going home to bed. But"—his eyes flickered up in a sharp, derisive flash—"I'll be glad to let you use my phone to call China or Alaska or Timbuktu. I've heard you have ex-admirers in all those places."

Suzy settled herself to a more comfortable position and lit a cigarette. There wasn't any point in losing her temper again. She'd tried that yesterday, and he'd simply crammed his hat on and walked out. And there was something about the set of his jaw that warned her he was about to do it again.

"Surely you're not afraid of me, Mr. Saunders!" Her voice was still soft, but there was a taunting quiver of insolence in it now. "There certainly can't be much danger in our having one small cocktail together, particularly if I agree to allow you to pick the most crowded bar in town."

Tip's lean, sun-darkened face didn't relax. "I wouldn't risk going to a church social with you." And then with elaborate sarcasm, "You see, I've been around the world. I want to settle down. I like my job here, and I intend to keep it. If I get mixed up with you, it will only end with your father's shipping me off to the other side of the world. So run along and get somebody else in trouble."

Flame touched Suzy's creamy skin. There was a dangerous glint in her eyes as she stood up, looked down at Tip's lowered head. Not that Tip noticed. He was once more engrossed in batting out tomorrow's headlines, brazenly indifferent that three words from Suzy would stop that story from ever appearing in printer's ink.

If she said to her father, "I love him," it would be finis to Tip's present job.

Oh, he wouldn't be fired. Her father was too smart to fire a reporter with Tip's brilliant record. But there'd be a sudden need for a reporter in South America or Europe or Australia. And Tip would be the only man for the job.

Suzy knew the routine. Let her dad suspect she was getting too interested in a man, and—presto!—that man got shipped off to some post thousands of miles away.

"No reporters in our family!" her father frequently thundered. And he meant it.

Until Tip Shane had been transferred from Paris to the New York office, her father's highhanded protection hadn't seriously bothered Suzy. She'd gone around with the men on her dad's papers because they were more fun than polo-playing night-clubbing socialites. Suppose her father did occasionally get wise and shift them from one post to another—they still had a job. And there was always somebody new to give her a whirl.

It took Tip, with his brutal frank-

ness, his humiliating indifference, to shock her into the realization that she hadn't been thinking about anything but her own amusement.

She wanted to tell him this, to explain apologetically, "I didn't mean to make trouble. As long as Dad never fired anybody on my account, it didn't seem to make much difference which of his papers they worked for. I just wanted to have fun. Surely you can't blame me for that."

But she wasn't used to explaining or apologizing. When she tried, the words stuck in her throat. And by the time she'd stopped trying, Tip was tearing the final page from his typewriter.

"Don't tell me you're still here!" He swung around in his chair, giving her a quick, casual glance. "You know," he said with a carelessness that was like a slap in the face, "if you weren't the boss' daughter, I'd say you were kind of cute. But I'm still glad this is one job where you don't have to make up to the boss' daughter."

With that audacity, he got up and walked away.

It was a challenge Suzy, being Suzy, couldn't ignore. Up until then she'd just been intrigued by the rigidly suppressed laughter that haunted the corners of Tip's flexible mouth, the bright inquisitiveness of his gray eyes. She'd wanted to make him like her because she was absolutely sure that he'd be more fun than any man she'd ever known.

Now, with his last remark, it had stopped being fun and become a grim battle of wills, a battle that she was going to win.

Suddenly aware of the avid but surreptitious grins of the other people in the newsroom, she took out her lipstick and deliberately painted her lips a flaunting crimson.

"Go ahead and gloat," she muttered in silent defiance. "I'm not licked yet. We'll have a date before another day is over. And he'll be the one who asks for it!"

THE next afternoon found her again perched airily on the edge of his desk. She didn't try to start a conversation; she simply sat and stared, eyes wide, a slow little smile at one corner of her red mouth. It was an old trick, but still a good one. Only a wooden Indian could remain impassive very long under that prolonged, fixed stare.

Tip stood it for a record-breaking time of ten minutes and thirty seconds. Suzy knew from the savage way he was pounding his typewriter that every nerve in his body was aching to pick her up and throw her out of the door. She also knew, with a fiendish satisfaction, that he didn't dare take the chance. Her father might not want her to marry a reporter, but he would certainly object to his one and only idolized child being manhandled by one of his employees.

It was an unfair advantage, of course. "But," she reflected wryly, "all's fair in love and war."

And it was Tip who had publicly and humiliatingly made the declaration of war. She'd tried to be friends with him. He'd forced her to be an enemy. And she could keep up her role of silent tormentor as long as he could take it.

Although her face remained impassive, something of her challenging thoughts must have reached him. Still not looking at her, he jerked a half-finished sheet from his typewriter, tossed it in the wastebasket, and rose.

"Okay, you win. I'll buy you a drink," he said with scathing irony. And his eyes added a silent, "I hope you choke on it."

Suzy met that look with a serene smile. Her bright head was high, her slender figure arrogantly erect, as they walked from the office. But the triumph was all outside.

Inwardly she was seething with the knowledge that she hadn't actually won a victory. She had simply blackmailed a man into grudgingly inviting her for a cocktail. At the prospect of drinking it in front of his chilled eyes,

his contemptuous smile, her spirit rebelled.

When the elevator reached the ground floor, she haughtily turned and held out her hand.

"I'm afraid I've changed my mind, Mr. Saunders," she drawled in her best slightly bored débutante voice. "Something tells me that you wouldn't be the most amusing cocktail company in the world. And I have an ironclad rule about refusing to be bored."

"So I've heard," he said casually, too casually. "But it just happens that I've decided I need a drink. And since I don't like to drink alone, I'm afraid you'll just have to go through with what you started."

He didn't wait for her objections. He simply grabbed her arm and propelled her out onto the street and into the nearest cocktail lounge.

"A double Scotch and soda for me," he told the waiter. "A champagne cocktail for the lady."

And at Suzy's quick start of surprise, "Oh, I know that you never drink anything stronger than wine, and that you prefer hamburgers with onions to caviar and squab, and that you always rush to the nearest fire because it's exciting. So are kisses. But" —his gray glance raked her astonished face—"they must never be taken seriously. Nothing should ever be taken seriously. Nothing—except excitement."

"Thumbnail sketch of Suzy Carter by that brilliant writer, Tip Saunders," Suzy flung back with an impudence she was far from feeling. "But since you seem to know so much about my past, maybe you'll also tell me about the future."

His eyes hardened into cold, impenetrable gray walls. "Perhaps I could. But I don't happen to be interested in your future, Miss Carter."

"But you must have been interested in my past," flashed across Suzy's mind. "Only how did you learn about my drinking champagne, and rushing to fires, and always laughing at kisses? Those little items were certainly never printed anywhere."

Yet, even as her lips formed the questions, something warned her that she'd better not utter them, for there was a strange danger flaring in Tip's narrowed gaze. She glided hastily past it, broke into a ripple of shaky laughter.

"If you won't talk about me, let's talk about you." Her eyes flashed a brilliant blue challenge into his. "Or better yet, tell me why you find me so hard to take. Most people don't, believe it or not."

Their eyes locked, held, until every nerve in Suzy's body was tense. She wanted to cry out, "Don't look at me like that—as if I were a particularly unpleasant species of woman!"

But it was his voice that cut the tenseness that was stretching to the snapping point.

"Suppose we skip personalities," he said with the air of having meant to say something else and abruptly changing his mind. "I'll admit most men wouldn't find you hard to take, Miss Carter. I'll even satisfy your vanity and admit that I might find it interesting myself.

"But I'm not going to! I don't expect this to interest you"—his mouth twisted—"but I'd sort of like to live for a while longer."

Suzy's brows drew together in a startled frown, and to her horror she felt the prick of tears against her lids. But she managed to retort flippantly enough, "Are you accusing me of being dynamite or poison, Mr. Saunders? Personally, I always thought I was pretty harmless. But maybe you have inside information."

WHAT new and barbed arrows he might have shot at her, Suzy never knew, for the door of the cocktail lounge crashed open, and

the paper's office boy rushed up to their table.

"They're looking everywhere for you, Mr. Saunders. I thought I'd find you here. You're to get going right away!" His words tumbled over each other in his excitement at having news to relate. "There's been a big explosion at the Baker airplane factory. They say you can see the flames for—"

Suzy reached the doorway one step behind Tip's racing stride. Before he could call a cab, she grasped his arm and clung determinedly.

"My car's parked around the corner," she gasped, "and I can beat any taxi driver in town."

He didn't waste time arguing. He didn't even speak until they had zigzagged a perilous path through the traffic crowded street and were on the open highway.

"If you always drive like that, you ought to have this thing fitted with a siren," he said then, but there was a grudging admiration behind his words. "Or better yet, you ought to get a job on a fire engine. It would save you the trouble of hunting for excitement."

"I would if they didn't have a stupid rule about your having to be six feet tall," Suzy came back pertly.

After that, she concentrated on her driving. Ahead of her she could see the sky turning pink with flames that were still miles away. If she got Tip there in record time, if she could help him scoop a front-page story— Recklessly she pressed the accelerator to the floor.

"You'd better stay in the car," he shouted as they swung into the sideroad that led to the roaring, blazing factory. "The gasoline tanks might explode. And if that happens, get away fast."

He was out of the car before it completely stopped. Showing his press card, he broke through the guard of policemen, raced toward the blazing buildings. The next instant, while he was still running, there came a gigantic roar, and a wall of flame soared straight into the sky.

Instinctively Suzy shut her eyes, clamped her hands against her ears. For the first time in her life, she knew how it felt to have something clutch at her heart, refuse to let it keep on beating.

When she finally opened her eyes to a world of suffocating smoke and flying sparks, she went limp with panic. Tip was somewhere in that blazing inferno, not Tip Saunders, the reporter, but Tip—the man she loved!

There was no use denying it any longer, when the truth was so achingly clear. No matter how he felt about her, she was in love with him. That was why she'd pursued him so shamelessly. That was why she'd been so blindly determined to make him like her.

She jumped out of the car. She had to find him! She either had to share his danger or force him back to safety.

Blinded with smoke, choking for breath, she pushed her way through the crowd that had rushed to see the biggest fire in years. She beat frenziedly at the people who blocked her way. When a policeman grabbed her, she fought like a small mad demon.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she protested wildly. "I've got to find him! I—"

"It's all right, officer. I'll take care of her," a curt authoritative voice cut in. "I'm Tip Saunders of the *Record*. This is Caleb Carter's daughter."

At the magic words "*Record*" and "Carter," the policeman's harshness disappeared. "I'm sorry I was rough, Miss Carter," he apologized gruffly, "but you might have gotten hurt. You'd better let me take you back to your car. This crowd's getting pretty rough."

"Thanks, officer," Tip replied. "I'd like to get to a phone fast. There's a big story behind this."

WHEN they reached the roadster, he slid into the driver's seat. Suzy huddled beside him, hands gripped around her knees, teeth clenched to still their chatter. As they raced toward the nearest telephone booth, she stole quick, frightened glances at Tip's set profile. His hair was singed, and there was a red burn running along his soot-blacked cheek.

But he didn't look seriously injured. Neither did he give any sign of having heard her shameless screaming at the policeman when he'd come to her rescue.

"Better have some coffee while I'm phoning," he said as he braked the car in front of a road stand. "You look as if you needed it."

Suzy definitely did need it, but she couldn't move. Reaction was setting in, making her feel like a sawdust doll that had suddenly had the stuffing shaken out of it. Falling back against the cushions, she closed her smoke-stung eyes and let the world go blank.

The next thing she knew, Tip was saying in a tight, hoarse voice, "You —you crazy little fool! Why didn't you tell me you were hurt?"

"I'm all right." Suzy sat up, blinked at the throb of pain that shot through her head. "I just got sort of socked around while I was trying to get you— I mean get through the crowd."

And then, childishly, humiliatingly, her lips began to quiver. Tip, staring down at her, paled until there was a line of white about his taut mouth, and his whole face looked pinched with a terrific effort at control.

It was Suzy who flung herself against him. But it was his mouth that claimed hers, clung with a desire so fierce, so unchecked that she trembled uncontrollably. But she couldn't pull away. His kiss was brutal, almost an insult, but still she wanted it, so she gave back love for desire, tenderness for fierceness. And when he finally released her, his were the eyes that were evasive, that refused to meet the shining, unashamed emotion in hers.

"Why do you hate me, Tip?" Her husky, breathless voice betrayed how valiantly she was fighting off tears. "What have I ever done to make you kiss me like—like that?"

He shook his head as if he still didn't trust himself to answer. He fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette, brought out a crumpled pack, lit one with fingers that shook.

"If I told you that Reg Allen was my best friend, would that answer your question?" he said at last.

And when Suzy didn't answer, he lashed out with the fury of bitterness too long pent up, "You can't even remember him, can you? Yet he loved you terribly. And because of you, he's now in a Chinese grave, killed in an air raid. That's a pretty big price to pay for a few faithless kisses!"

Suzy's head dropped forward, crowded by a welling wave of shock. She was remembering with a sinking sensation a big, blond, completely devil-may-care young man named Reg. He'd crashed her début two years before. And for a month or so they'd tried to outwit each other, thinking up crazy stunts, fresh thrills.

Between escapades, he had made love to her, and she had flirted back in a careless, laughing fashion. But neither of them had taken it seriously. When he'd abruptly dropped out of the picture, she'd gone merrily on to new conquests. Now, forcing her mind back two years, Suzy remembered that there had been some love letters, letters that had stopped coming when she had answered with wise-cracking cables or flippant little notes.

She tried to tell Tip all this. Halting, fumbling for the right words, she ended, "Maybe I did flirt—more than I should have. But that's the worst thing I did. It—it certainly wasn't my fault Reg went to China."

"It was your father's fault!" Tip's voice was like cold steel now. "And he sent Reg there on your account. He can't control his spoiled, pampered only child. But he can pick up a reporter's life and toss it anywhere he

likes—just so it's safely out of your reach. What happens to the reporter obviously has never worried either of you."

"That's not true!" Suzy cried, at bay. "I never meant to hurt anybody. I'm sorry about—about Reg. But if you knew him well, you must have known how he rushed in at the first scent of a story that held danger and excitement. What happened in China might have happened anywhere. So how can you be so bitter and unfair? How can you want to hurt me, when"—she lowered her head to hide the tears—"I love you so?"

"Reg thought you loved him, too," Tip retorted, harsh and remorseless. "From the stories I've heard, a lot of men have thought the same thing since you knew him. I could love you, Suzy. Maybe— I do love you. But I'm not going to be another scalp on your belt, another reporter who suddenly finds himself on a fast plane going in the opposite direction."

"You—you could marry me, Tip," Suzy whispered in a small, humble voice that didn't seem to belong to her at all.

His grating laugh smashed against her heart. "Sure I could marry you. And you could get tired of me. And Papa could send me out to work on the Reno paper while we got our divorce. Thanks. But even with a wedding ring thrown in for protection, I'm still not taking the chance," he finished with a scathing, bitter finality.

FOR stubbornly proud weeks, Suzy fought to forget him. She drove down to Palm Beach. She flew by special plane to Nassau, She flirted with every man she met. Then she gave up and started for home.

No matter what Tip had said, what he thought of her, she loved him. Let him call her a selfish flirt, a callous thrill-hunter. Let him tear to shreds the heart he didn't believe she had. She had to see him again. She had to try once more to shatter the wall between them.

But there was very little left of the thoughtless, arrogant, high-handed Suzy Carter in the girl who sat waiting in a back booth of the cocktail lounge near the *Record's* office. True, she still wore mink and real emeralds, and her misty hair had been transformed into a halo of silver by a Fifth Avenue hairdresser.

But her blue eyes were dark with panic, and her mouth was as tremulous as a child's who hopes to be kissed but knows it is going to be beaten. Suppose Tip just ignored her note! Suppose he coldly refused her plea that he meet her here for just one cocktail!

She involuntarily shut her eyes against the thought. When she opened them again, Tip was standing before her, terrifyingly big and broad-shouldered, ominously grim.

"Won't you sit down?" Suzy said, with a brave, if shaking, valor. "I can't talk to you way up there."

"There's nothing to talk about." But even as he said it, he was dropping into the seat across from her.

Slowly, reluctantly, his gaze met hers. And it was as if an electric current had been turned on, holding them as helpless as two magnetized poles. Maybe he didn't love her, but desire was sweeping from him to her with a force that left her breathless.

"What are we going to do?" she whispered at last.

"I—don't—know." His face was haggard, almost gaunt. "You're in my blood, Suzy. I've been crazy—wanting you—these past weeks. But marriage is still out. It"— he brushed a clenched fist across his burning eyes —"it simply wouldn't work."

"But it would! It would!" Suzy cried silently. "Dad might be angry at first, but I can manage him. And I'll make you forget about Reg. I'll be so good, so faithful, that you'll have to believe that it wasn't my fault—that you were the first man who ever counted."

But she knew, with a dreadful helplessness, that it wouldn't do any good

to say those things. He simply wouldn't believe her. She had to think of something else, something more convincing.

"You don't have to marry me, Tip." Surely it wasn't Suzy Carter saying those words, Suzy Carter going on with a defiant, "We can just go away somewhere for the week-end. You don't want to put a price tag on your love. Well"—she laughed recklessly—"I'm giving you mine without any price tag."

He stared at her with eyes that flared, then went dead and empty. His mouth hardened, grew almost cruel. "You don't mean that! The Suzy Carters of the world take, but they don't give. You wouldn't have the nerve to go through with it."

Suzy had no intention of going through with it. Yet her fixed smile held as she taunted, "Why don't you try it and see?"

It was completely shameless, the scheme that flashed its temptation through her mind. But Suzy was beyond pride or fear or sanity. This was her last chance. And if she lost—well, Tip would only despise her a little more than he already did.

YET as she watched him scrawl the words, "Mr. and Mrs. Saunders," on the register of a decidedly out-of-the-way country hotel, she couldn't suppress a shudder. It was too late to make a dash for freedom. The indifferent clerk was handing Tip a key. The too knowing, wise-eyed bellboy had already picked up their bags. There was nothing to do but follow him up the creaking stairs that led to the second floor.

"Bring us some sherry and a double Scotch," Tip said to the boy who hovered expectantly at the door. "And make it snappy."

He didn't look at Suzy. He hadn't really looked at her since he had accepted her brazen proposal. Not that Suzy wanted him to! It was hard enough to keep up her brittle pose of sophistication she did not feel. If she ever met his eyes, she'd simply go to pieces and tell her whole guilty secret.

Remembering the necessity of fighting for time, she said, "Aren't we going to have dinner? And don't you think it might be more"—she dropped to a lazy drawl—"discreet if we had cocktails and dinner downstairs?"

He swung around. His face was a mask. "Don't you think it's a little late to think about discretion? Or are you already beginning to back out on your own proposition?"

"I just thought it might be a little livelier downstairs," Suzy countered above the tumultuous beating of her heart. "You haven't been exactly the most amusing companion in the world."

"I didn't know you wanted to be amused." He was definitely challenging her now. "Believe it or not, this sort of thing is new to me. But I'll try to improve my technique."

With a swift, lithe stride, he was across the room. He caught her, held her with insulting closeness. His mouth was mocking. But there was something close to agony in his eyes as they flamed down into hers.

"Suzy—Suzy—" It was the cry of a man close to desperation. "Why are we here? What are we doing? This sort of thing isn't for us!" His arms tightened convulsively around her. "Oh, my darling—my sweet—"

The kiss that followed was as near heaven as Suzy cared to get. There was no longer hate in it, or desire or angry fierceness. There was just tenderness and a silent plea for forgiveness, for understanding, for something terribly close, something terribly dear.

"You—you do love me, don't you?" There was a poignant defenseless radiance in her face as she looked up at him. "Why have you made it so hard, Tip? Why have you forced me to—"

If she could only have finished that sentence! Safe in the circle of his arms, protected by the love he no longer had the strength to deny, she could have told him about the dread-

ful thing she had done, told about it so honestly, so humbly, that he would have understood. But she and Tip were not destined for easy understanding.

They were still clinging to each other, lost in star dust and ecstasy, when a heavy fist began to beat on the door. A roaring voice demanded that they open the door at once, or it would be crashed to pieces.

"That—that's my father," Suzy said faintly. "Oh, Tip, I—"

"Don't bother to explain!" Sardonic, disillusioned, Tip moved toward the door, flung it open. "I recognize a shotgun when I see one. I see now that you suggested this week-end idea just so your father could break in on us and insist that I marry you. It's too bad your timing is so poor, Suzy. In another minute I'd have been crazy enough to ask you to marry me."

THE scene that followed was sheer chaos. Mr. Carter, gray-haired, red-faced and irate, refused to listen to anything but his own bellowing. He was not only going to fire Tip; he was going to ruin him in the newspaper game. He was going to shut Suzy in a convent or a nice, safe sanitarium. He was going to find the person who had sent him an anonymous telegram telling him of his daughter's scandalous behavior, and buy his silence if it cost a million dollars.

"I sent that telegram, Dad!" Suzy stepped between the two men, and there was a great deal of her father's fighting spirit mirrored on her white face. "I wanted you to find us here. I wanted you to force Tip to marry me. But I should have known that that sort of thing went out with hoop skirts.

"You're a modern man, and you believe in modern methods!" Her voice, though still low, was beginning to shake with suppressed hysteria. "You crush anything that interfers with what you want. Because I'm your daughter, you don't dare crush me, so you buy me furs and jewels and cars and tell me to run along, and be a nice little girl. You never once asked me what I wanted. You never stopped to think of the reputation you were giving me by breaking up my friendships with the type of man I like, the type of man I want to marry.

"Well"—she flung her head up, her arms back in a gesture of rebellion—"I'm through. Let the papers print anything they like. Let the whole world sneer at the news that Caleb Carter's daughter had to stoop to tricking a man into marrying her. At least I won't be reading it, because I'm finished with anything connected with a newspaper! And you can both go to—to—"

"Suzy!"

"Suzy!"

The name tore simultaneously from two throats. But it was on Tip that Suzy whirled that time.

"Don't worry! You won't be fired!" she lashed out furiously. "You wanted revenge. You wanted to be safe. Well, you've gotten both things."

Tears were streaming down her cheeks. "From now on you can write your own ticket, Mr. Saunders. If my father gets out of hand, just remind him of that register downstairs. I'll swear that I was the woman. And only the three of us will ever need to know I did it because" — she turned her bright, gallant head away from him—"I was a headstrong little fool who couldn't help loving you."

She didn't see her father's eyes blur. She didn't see Tip's dark face twisted with remorse and something much stronger.

"Let me handle this—please," Tip was silently begging Mr. Carter.

"Take care of her," Mr. Carter's eyes were begging Tip. "I thought I was doing the right thing. I wanted to keep her sheltered and protected. I guess I forgot that she was young, and that youth likes to pick its own risks."

Suzy didn't know any of this. She didn't see her father tiptoe from the room. She was alone, sinking deeper

and deeper in a pool of anguish that threatened to engulf her.

It was Tip's tense fingers, gripping her shoulders, that pulled her back. From what must be a new and different world, she heard him saying, "I've been a first-class heel, Suzy. I'm not asking you to forget that. But I am asking you to believe that—I love you. I've wanted to hurt you because I thought you'd hurt Reg—because I was afraid you'd hurt me.

"And then, when you asked me to come here with you"—his hands tightened on her shoulders—"I figured it would be a showdown. I knew you didn't mean it, but I couldn't figure out what your motive was. And now—"

"You're going to be a perfect little gentleman." Suzy braced her palms against his chest, pushed him violently away. "Your speeches are very pretty, Mr. Saunders, but this time I'm not having any."

His answer to that was typically masculine. He didn't argue. He simply caught her close, smothered any further objections with kisses. He was man, the pursuer, man, the conqueror! And he had chosen her as the girl he loved. If she didn't like it—

But as her lips flamed under his, she did!

Her Past, Her Present, Her Future Caught up with Her All at the Same Time

He said, "You're lying, Fanchon. You love me."

Desperate Bride

THEY were obviously very much in love. People who saw them together smiled at them, and waiters hurried to fill their orders first. Maybe it was because of Nicky's lazy young smile. Or maybe it was because of Fanchon's soft, adoring eyes.

Nicky said, ignoring his coffee now just as he had ignored it ten minutes ago, "Don't stare so, angel. It's rude."

"I can't help it," Fanchon apologized ruefully. "It's on account of you're so handsome. Someone must have dipped you in brown lacquer, your tan is so smooth and even."

"Tennis court lacquer," he agreed. "It didn't even hurt, except I sprained my wrist twice. How do you keep

By Val Newell

those silly curls from getting fuzzy and wind-blown? Such neatness isn't natural."

She smiled at him, and he smiled at her. There was something breathless and exquisite suspended between them.

"Fanchon—"

"Nicky—"

"I'm afraid we're falling in love."

"We can't, darling! It isn't reasonable. Three days—"

"Three eternities, Fanchon. That's how long I've known you. It was way back in the first eternity that I saw you and someone said, 'Here's Fanchon, Nicky.' And there you were, too sweet to forget, too lovely to ignore."

"All of that?"

"Even more, beautiful."

Fanchon looked down at her hands. They were small, soft hands. A medium-large diamond lent just the right touch of luxury to them.

She said, low, "Three days or three years or three eternities—what difference does it make? I'm going to be married. It's the day after tomorrow, at two-thirty. I'd give you an invitation to attend, but I can't."

"I'd love that," he said roughly, his lightness all driven away by a passionate tenseness. "Seeing you marry another guy I haven't even met. What's his name? Rupert? A girl who would marry a man with a name like that—"

"He's nice. He's—kind. He's sweet. And he loves me."

There was much more to it than that, but she couldn't tell him because Nicky didn't know. She prayed that he would never know. Only last night she had sobbed herself to sleep, frightened that someone would tell Nicky that she was the girl who had caused his brother to kill himself.

She shivered a little, and Nicky's eyes had bright blue flames in them, watching her.

"What is it, Fanchon?"

"Nothing," she whispered.

"Do you hate it that much, marrying him?"

"I don't hate it at all, Nicky. Please believe that. I love Rupert. We've always known each other, always intended some day—"

"Say it again," he said evenly.

"We've always intended to marry—it was a sort of understanding—"

He said impatiently, "Not that. The other. About loving him. Say it slowly, Fanchon. And don't look away like that, darling."

She couldn't meet his eyes. She couldn't say the words again, not with him watching her with such deliberate intentness. They weren't true, anyway. She didn't love Rupert. But she liked him tremendously, and it was very necessary that she keep telling herself frantically that she loved him. It might be a form of self-hypotism, but she had to marry Rupert.

Nicky found a cigarette and lighted it. He smoked it quickly, angrily, staring at her through the blue haze. He said, "You're lying, Fanchon. You love me. There's no use in denying it."

"I—"

"You love me," he repeated. "Three days or no three days."

"Nicky, no! Can't you understand—"

He dropped a half inch of ashes into his saucer. His hand was very steady. How could he be like that when she was trembling, when her breath was ragged just because she was with him and he was talking about love?

"If you'll stop objecting long enough, Fanchon, I'll propose to you. I usually don't propose to other men's brides-to-be. But will you marry me?"

Her breath caught in her throat. It stuck, hurting her. She stared at him.

"It doesn't take long, you know, darling. You could be my wife less than an hour from now. I could take you home with me—out of this mess."

She whispered, "Mess?"

His eyes darkened. They were almost black. They met hers steadily, and his voice was oddly gentle.

"Did you think I didn't know, Fanchon?"

"Didn't—know—"

"About Edgar and you. He wrote me a note. It said, 'I am going to marry Fanchon Fane. Wish me luck.' I came here to meet Fanchon Fane. And before I arrived he was dead."

Her heart felt tight and sick within her. She said, "But you didn't come, Nicky! That was six months ago, and you didn't come. I don't understand any of this at all."

His generous mouth tensed. "No. I changed my mind."

"Nicky—"

He said swiftly, "Let's not talk about it, shall we, Fanchon? It's over. It's done. I just wanted you to know that I know. You need never be afraid of my finding out. So marry me, Fanchon. Right now—as quick as you can."

"Nicky—I can't—"

He made a little movement toward her with his hand, and then stopped. He rose.

"Come on, let's go. I want to talk. I want to—kiss you. I can't do it in a café."

SHE had to go home. She had slipped out to have lunch with Nicky, but now she must go back. There were things that had to be done, when day after tomorrow was her wedding day, when she was going to marry Rupert.

She tried to tell Nicky that, but he wouldn't listen. He put her into his car, and drove very fast out of town. The road wandered past green farms, through shady woods, and finally along a river, pea green, slow, not too wide. There were trees to drive under, where no one would notice.

"This must be Lovers' Roost," Nicky said, shutting off the motor. "Very fine on a moonlit night."

There wasn't any moonlight just now. There was only sharp, bright sunlight finding its way through the trees overhead, glinting against the ripples in the river.

Nicky took her into his strong young arms and kissed her. It was a long and hard and tender kiss. It was a little bit pleading, a little bit desperate. And he whispered against her quivering lips, "I love you, Fanchon. I love you, darling."

She said shakenly, "Nicky, no! You mustn't. Because it doesn't do any good—I still have to marry Rupert. There was such a mess, and he was the only one of my friends—even of my best ones—to stand by me. I can't run off—not now. A broken engagement—"

"You didn't think much about breaking your engagement to Edgar," Nicky said. It slipped out so smoothly that for an instant she didn't realize what he meant.

She had broken her engagement to Edgar. That was what people had said—friends and enemies and even the police—that she had broken her engagement to Edgar after he had sent his wife to Reno because of Fanchon, carelessly, indifferently broken her engagement.

And Edgar had gone home and quietly turned on all the burners of the gas range, and hadn't bothered to turn them off again.

Only she hadn't broken her engagement. She said it time and again, but she stopped saying it because people only smiled politely, or not politely, and wouldn't believe her.

Edgar had said, "Fanchon, I'm sorry. I thought I loved you, dear. But I guess it's still Lorraine I love. I must have been mad—crazy—"

Fanchon had been still and stunned. She had whispered, "Even after all she's done? Even after divorcing you for Duke Brandon?"

Dark, handsome, shady, worthless—that was Duke Brandon. An habitué of cheap roadhouses and gambling places. Flashy, daring, an expert at

making love to someone else's bored wife.

He'd made love to Lorraine. He had more money to spend on her, more time to spend on her. Lorraine liked that because Edgar never seemed to have enough money or time. So she flitted off to Reno, with Duke paying the bill.

And Fanchon, who worked in Edgar's office, had been sorry for him. When he asked her to go to a dance with him because he admitted he didn't want to stay home in the lonely house and think about Lorraine, she'd gone. And it had led to other things.

But he went on loving Lorraine, despite Fanchon. How much, she hadn't known until he had taken back the engagement ring he gave her, and the police were asking her terrible questions. Had she jilted Edgar, and were they happy together, and how long had she and Edgar been in love before Lorraine became disgusted and sued for divorce? Things like that.

Even with a divorce, even with Duke Brandon lounging in the background, Lorraine was the unhappy, wronged wife. She was dramatic in mourning—black chiffons, black furs, black veils that came far below her shoulders and made her seem hauntingly lovely.

Lorraine had said, "I divorced him because he asked me to. I have nothing to say about Edgar and that girl."

That girl!

Fanchon had kept her head high. There wasn't much use in explaining. She couldn't fight against Lorraine's pose, not without making herself ridiculous. So she said, "I loved him. We were happy. I meant to marry him. I don't know why he did this." And finally she stopped saying even that, because nobody believed her. Nobody but Rupert.

How could she tell all that to Nicky when he had said he didn't want to talk about Edgar?

She said, her face white, "I didn't break the engagement. Edgar broke it. You must believe that, Nicky."

He looked at her for an instant, and then kissed her again. It was long and sweet, tearing her heart apart.

"I believe you," he said. "I've got to believe you. Though Edgar must have been insane to let you go. You are going to marry me, aren't you, Fanchon? This afternoon."

"It's impossible, Nicky! I can't—Nicky, please don't kiss me again!"

His mouth was very close to hers. It was firm and sure. He spoke lightly, to nobody in particular.

"She's scared. She must be weakening. One more kiss will do it, I think. At the most, two. Darling, must you always be so beautiful? Don't you ever let up?"

"Nicky—"

Kisses—Nicky's kisses. Persuasive, insistent, devastating, lighting white fires of love that she had never dreamed herself capable of feeling. Kisses to lull her conscience, kisses to make her realize that nothing was important but this.

She was sobbing a little, clinging to him helplessly.

"It's all wrong—it doesn't make sense, Nicky!"

"You will?"

She whispered, "Yes—oh, yes! You knew I would, didn't you?"

He laughed at her, teasingly, triumphantly. And he let her go and started the car. They were off to be married.

FANCHON said, "You have the moral scruples of a gangster, Nicky!"

"Love me a little?"

"I certainly shouldn't. My conscience is in a terrible condition. Poor Rupert! That telegram must have been a horrible shock to him."

They were at a night club, a very swanky one in the city. Fanchon had not gone home for her clothes. Nicky

assured her that she didn't need clothes, at least, not old ones. So they bought new ones.

That is the advantage of eloping after lunch instead of at midnight. You can buy a trousseau the same day, provided of course that you have a willing and indulgent husband.

Nicky seemed to be both willing and indulgent. He had insisted on a white satin gown because all conventional brides wear white satin. Besides, the gleaming whiteness was a bit startling against Fanchon's rich black curls and smooth, sun-tanned skin.

"Your mouth is red satin," Nicky said dreamily. "It's funny, but I've never danced with you before. This is my first dance with my wife. You do it handsomely, my dear."

"Thank you, sir. You manage to get along yourself. Nicky, is the Hotel St. Croix as expensive as the doorman looks?"

"More expensive, beautiful. I might warn you that this is just a honeymoon fling. I can keep you in a manner to which you will have to become accustomed, but not quite like this. I'm a few shy of being a millionaire. Quite a few."

"If you were a poor, struggling artist in a tumbledown cottage—"

"Yes?"

Fanchon felt young and silly and terribly in love. She looked up at him, laughing a little, and forgot what she had meant to say, because Nicky was staring down at her, hard, and it was doing things to her temperature and equilibrium.

A brief shadow flitted across his face. His arm tightened.

"You'd better run away from me," he said. "I'm bad medicine for sweet little girls. Run, Fanchon—run for your life!"

"What life?" she asked shakily. "I haven't any. I gave it to you, Nicky. Don't you remember?"

He said huskily, "Let's go, darling."

They went back to the hotel. The St. Croix was expensive, brass buttons on the doorman, thick carpets underfoot and wrought-bronze stair railings.

They had a suite—sitting room, two bedrooms, a bath. Nicky pushed the hall door shut and looked down at her.

Fanchon was something to look at. White satin, white fox, black curls, a soft scarlet mouth and a shining adoration that was pretty obvious.

"I wonder," he said, looking at her, "if I'm quite fit for you to walk on."

"Don't be silly, Nicky!"

His gaze, too dark, too deep, slid down to the gleaming hem line of her gown. Tiny toeless slippers with fantastically high heels peered out.

He said, "They'd get pretty dirty."

Fanchon shook her head in a swift negative.

"Not so very. Anyway, angels get sort of boring after a while. I didn't marry you because you're an angel, Nicky."

"Fanchon—"

She put her hands up to his face and stood on tiptoe. She kissed him.

"We all have consciences, darling. I had my attack this afternoon, you're having yours now. Forget it. Which bedroom is yours, right or left?"

"Left," he said automatically.

She went into the right bedroom where the things she and Nicky had bought for her were. Her heart was beating fast. Maybe it was all wrong, hurting a man who had stood by her through a nasty storm and marrying someone she had known only three days. Maybe forgetting a conscience was all wrong, but she didn't care. It was too late now to care, anyway. And she loved Nicky so much that it didn't matter.

She thought, "Nicky is like me. Rupert isn't. We wouldn't have been happy, Rupert and I. We would have quarreled and been miserable. This is kinder, in the long run, than marrying him would have been."

It was only an excuse, of course, a cover-up. But it was true, even if

she hadn't thought of it until afterward.

She had white things, lots of them. She put on a sheer chiffon gown, sheer velvet robe and slippers and combed her hair. She looked sweet and fresh and awfully young.

She waited ten minutes, twenty minutes. She was restless, tense. She couldn't hear a sound in Nicky's room. Finally she went over and pulled open the sitting room door, very quietly.

NICKY had never left the room. He was sunk deep in a lounge chair, smoking, and the ashtray beside him was piled with discarded butts and ashes.

He looked up and saw her there. Small, slim, lovely. He did not rise, but one eyebrow moved a quarter of an inch upward.

"Nicky, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, darling. Nothing at all. Except that I'm not quite such a heel as I thought I was."

She went over to him slowly. She stood beside his chair looking down at the thick, careless wave of his hair. He could have reached out and touched her if he had wanted to.

"Nicky, tell me."

"All right. It's very simple, Fanchon. I don't love you."

She wouldn't believe it. He wasn't serious. She even laughed a little and sat on the thick upholstered arm of his chair.

"Go on, darling. This fascinates me!"

"Fanchon, I love Lorraine. I loved her before Edgar ever saw her. I was the one who introduced them. But they fell in love so there was nothing I could do but back out with as much grace as I could find."

"Nicky, you're kidding!" she cried incredulously.

His voice was even. Too even.

"I mean it. I loved her, but she fell in love with Edgar. And she was very happy with him, until you came along. You're beautiful, Fanchon. Too beautiful. If I had a wife, I'd know what to do when a girl like you came along, but Edgar wasn't clever enough. He fell for you."

She was sitting quite still now, her smile frozen on her face.

"You wrecked Lorraine's happiness, Fanchon. You smashed it flat. And then you had to wreck Edgar, too. You broke your engagement. Why, Fanchon? Did he bore you?"

She stared at him. She wanted to speak, but the words were thick and stricken in her throat, unbearably painful.

"Lorraine still loves Edgar," he went on. "She'll always love him. She'll never marry another man. I know because I asked her to marry me. I thought I could make her happy again, but she wouldn't let me."

Fanchon's words made a tense, thin sound. "Lorraine! No, of course she wouldn't let you. Why should she? She doesn't want you. She wants Duke Brandon! She—"

Nicky's blazing eyes stopped her. "She wants Edgar! She'll never stop wanting him back. You should be proud of doing what you did to her. You should be proud of what you did to Edgar, too. But it's nothing to you, is it? You wanted him when you couldn't have him, and then when you got him, you thought he was dull. So you told him so. Engagements are made to be broken, aren't they?"

Fanchon rose to her feet. She was very white, almost as white as the trailing, lovely robe Nicky had bought for her. She said through shaken lips, "All right, Nicky. You married me to get even. And now what?"

Nicky rose, too. He was tall, very tall. But he looked weary and unhappy and not at all menacing.

"I didn't intend to marry you, Fanchon. I meant to make you fall in love with me, and then I'd have gone away. But you were engaged to Rupert, and all you'd do would be to go ahead and marry him as you'd planned. It didn't seem quite enough. So I thought if I married you myself—made you give

up everything for me the way Edgar did for you—and then walked out—"

She forced a smile. It was hard and brittle and icy, but somehow it managed to be a smile.

"Why don't you walk out, then?"

He watched her oddly. "Sure," he said. "And why didn't I go in there? You were waiting for me, Fanchon, weren't you? After all, you're mine—you're my wife—"

She whispered, "You're low—low!"

"I told you. Only I'm not quite low enough. I don't know why. Except that you looked so young—and sweet. You still do, for that matter."

She took a panicky step away from him. "If you dare touch me—"

"Don't worry, I won't. Not again. I'm too smart. Moth and the flame. Only I know enough to be careful about flames, beautiful. Want me to drive you home?"

"I—no! Just leave me alone. Just—never speak to me again. I wish I could hate you—I wish—" Her words sounded jerky, torn.

"Can't you?" Nicky asked. "Maybe I'm slipping. Maybe I didn't do such a fine job after all. I at least ought to rate a good, healthy hatred."

He looked queerly pale, but Fanchon didn't notice that. She whirled and ran into the bedroom, slamming the door loudly. She leaned against it, her eyes far too bright, and tried to think. Something to wear—some way to get home.

She wanted to cry. People always cried when hurting things happened to them. But she couldn't. The tears were locked up tightly. The sobs were hard in her throat, stinging, but they wouldn't come out.

Something to wear—her blue suit, of course. The one she had worn this noon to have lunch with Nicky. Only this noon—way back ten years ago, this noon. And Nicky had said, "I love you," and hadn't meant it in the least.

She slid down into a limp heap on the floor, her face in her hands. If she could cry, maybe it wouldn't hurt so much. If she could be angry, or if she could despise him—why couldn't she? She had cried over Edgar, cried terribly. And she hadn't loved him a tenth as much as she loved Nicky.

The door moved behind her, stirring the limp piles of shining velvet on the floor about her. Fanchon whispered frantically, "Go away. Please, please go away!"

"Get dressed." His voice was tense, tired. "I'll take you back. You have two days, and your father has some influence. You can get an annulment in time to be married. You can tell Rupert that the wire you sent was just a joke. If he's dumb enough, he may believe you."

"Rupert?" she repeated dully. She had forgotten Rupert.

"You want him, don't you?"

"Oh—oh, yes. Of course I do! I—he means everything—"

SHE stopped suddenly. She was lying and he knew it. The knowledge was there in his eyes, mingled with a little pity and a lot of self-loathing. He was hating himself because he hadn't had nerve enough to carry through his own plans.

It was a long drive and a miserably silent one. Fanchon huddled deep in the seat, not looking at him, not trying to think about him. But she was terribly conscious of his nearness, his warmth, his slightest movement.

Nearing her home, she felt him turn to look at her. He said, "We'd better stop somewhere for coffee. There are places still open. And you can put on some lipstick and such. I can't take you home like this."

"What's the matter with this?" she demanded.

"Nothing much, except that I've sent you through an emotional wringer and you look pretty limp. Fanchon—if there's anything I can do—"

She said through small, even teeth, "Yes, there is. Go take a running jump into the bay, Nicky."

And then on second thought she amended it. "No, you'd better not. I shouldn't like the scandal."

"Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you do hate me after all."

"That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"I don't know, Fanchon," he said, not very happily. "All the things I thought I wanted I don't seem to care about any more. Shall we stop here?"

It was a small, attractive tavern, but she said on an impulse, "No. Not here. There is a place closer to home, but not too close. It's called Dive Inn."

"It sounds like a dump," Nicky said frankly.

It was a dump, but a popular one. A cheap little place, filled with cigarette smoke and the odor of stale beer and intolerably loud music.

Fanchon knew that it was one of Duke Brandon's pet hangouts. It was getting late, but maybe Duke would be there tonight.

Maybe Lorraine would be there, too. Nicky would see then how heartbroken she was—with Duke Brandon to console her!

Duke had been consoling her for some time now. Maybe some day he would marry her. It had been six months since her divorce, but he hadn't gotten around to the subject of wedding rings yet to anybody's knowledge.

Nicky stood in the doorway of Dive Inn and looked at it with obvious distaste.

"I wonder," he said, "if they ever heard of coffee in a place like this?"

"The coffee isn't as important as the lipstick, is it?" she asked coldly. "That was what you insinuated anyway."

He looked down at her. He started to speak, but didn't. There was nothing that he could say really. He couldn't say he was sorry because he had done it on purpose. He couldn't wish her better luck next time because he knew there wouldn't be any next time. He knew that she was madly, completely in love with him.

"You don't need lipstick," he said slowly. "You don't need anything. I think I'll go away quietly and blow myself up."

"Do that. But take me home first."

They had coffee in a booth toward the back. Strong black coffee and sugar doughnuts. Nicky smoked, watching her, his blue eyes veiled.

"The worst of it is," he said finally, "I seem to be in love with you after all."

Fanchon's heart stopped completely. She set down her cup with fingers that suddenly had gone wobbly.

"Don't joke," she whispered.

"Do I look as if I were joking?"

He didn't. He looked like an insane combination of thorough misery and complete adoration. Fanchon sat quite still and waited.

"We're married," Nicky said gently. "You love me. And I love you. Anything else is pretty silly, isn't it?"

"Is it?" she faltered.

"Let's go back to the St. Croix, darling, and start all over again. We can turn an ugly memory into a lovely one, Fanchon."

He meant it. He wasn't fooling this time. He didn't mean to take her back there only to hurt her cruelly all over again.

"Nicky—about Edgar—"

"Let's skip Edgar, shall we?"

"We can't skip him. He was your brother. As long as we live, you'll never quite forgive me for his death, will you, Nicky?"

His eyes were burning bright.

"Silly!" he said gently. "What kind of talk is that? Edgar is gone, and we must forget him."

"And Lorraine?"

"Fanchon, I love you. Isn't that enough?"

Someone touched him on the shoulder. Someone in a red satin gown that was certainly eye-catching. Someone with flyaway gold curls and a mouth that was much too bright.

"Well, well, well!" Lorraine cried, not quite steadily. "If it isn't Nicky, talking about love again! 'Lo, Nicky. And Edgar's girl, poor Edgar. 'Lo, Fanchon. You didn't get him, after all, did you?"

"Take it easy," Duke Brandon said, an amused smile on his dark, handsome face. "Maybe I'd better take you home, baby."

"Don't wanta go home. Wanta talk to Nicky. Nicky, this's Duke Brandon. Friend of mine. Good friend. Been a friend for a long time, haven't you, Dukie?"

Fanchon was very still, watching Nicky. He was looking at Lorraine hard as if he might be seeing double, only strong black coffee doesn't make men see double.

Lorraine didn't look like the wronged wife in mourning any more. She didn't look like the sweet, wistful girl Edgar had thought he married, either. Her mouth was blurred from Duke's kisses, and her hair was rumpled, and she didn't seem to care that Duke's arm was casually around her.

FANCHON saw Nicky looking at Duke, his blue eyes gleaming softly. Duke was big and dark. He was sleek. He had a wise smile beneath a close-trimmed mustache, and he had an even wiser pair of eyes. No girl would ever give Duke Brandon the runaround, Duke's eyes said. He got exactly what he wanted out of life, and if there were any fast ones, he pulled them himself.

"Come on, baby," Duke said. "You're talking too much. Home and to bed for you."

"You knew my brother?" Nicky asked carefully. A lot lay behind the simple question.

And Duke, knowing exactly what Nicky was thinking, said, "Sure. Why not?" And he grinned down at Lorraine and took her away.

Nicky was silent for a long time. He stared down at what was left of a doughnut. Fanchon waited, hardly daring to breathe.

"Okay," he said finally, lifting his eyes. "What does that make me?"

"Your guess ought to be pretty good," she said faintly.

"You mentioned Duke Brandon a while ago, didn't you? And I wanted to knock you down, only a man doesn't knock his wife down. That man's not small-town stuff—and she's known him for a long time. She must have known him in the city before she met Edgar. That makes me—Nicky, the wise guy—and not Edgar, the original fool, doesn't it?"

"Nicky—I'm sorry."

He laughed, softly. "Sorry? For what? I told you a few minutes ago, didn't I? I love you. Lorraine is strictly past tense."

He rose. "Let's get out of here."

It didn't seem to take long, going back. Maybe that was because Nicky reached out and caught her hand, holding it tightly, warmly in his. Or maybe it was because her heart was doing silly stunts all the way.

Soon they were in the city. And then they were in the hotel, the elevator, the hall. They were back in a sitting room that had soft lights and thick carpets. He held both her hands tightly in his. His eyes were shining.

"Tell me now," he said. And then he added, "No, don't. I already know. She got the divorce for Duke, but Edgar kept on loving her, didn't he? You came in afterward. You can fill in the gaps of that tomorrow, if you want to. But for tonight—"

She whispered on a ragged little breath, "Tonight, Nicky?"

Arms swept around her, Nicky's arms, strong and sure.

"Tonight I have you right here in my arms, and you're staying there. Tonight and all the other nights. Forever. Any objections, beautiful?"

There were no objections whatever, but Fanchon didn't get around to telling him so. Instead she lifted soft lips to meet the dizzying sweetness of Nicky's kiss.

Not Quite Nice!

She Made Her Living the Only Way She Knew How — by Being Notorious!

By Peggy Gaddis

CHAPTER I

"YOU see, darling, Aunt Susan is really swell," Phil insisted eagerly. As always, Ann found the pressure of his arms about her, his nearness, a little frightening. Did he know that she could refuse him nothing—or very nearly nothing—while he held her like that? "But she's terribly old-fashioned and straitlaced and all that. And if she knew her favorite nephew and heir was about to marry a girl—well, a girl who works in a New York night club—she'd probably throw a fit. You see, Aunt Susan has never even seen a night club, but she's quite sure that they're sinful. If she could get to know you as you really are, she'd be crazy about you!"

"So I am to go up there looking like a freak and pretending to be a secretary-companion so she can get a chance to know me before she finds out that I'm 'The Girl in the Pearl' at the Club Neptune!" said Ann. She pushed him a little away from her so that she could think a little more clearly. "But, darling, it's—well, it doesn't make sense. Me a secretary? I can't use a typewriter or do shorthand—"

"Aunt Susan would be terrified of you if you could," Phil assured her. "I'll bet she doesn't have half a dozen letters a month to write—and what few she does write, she'll want written in longhand. No, darling, it's really a companion she wants—I've managed to convince her of that—somebody young and pretty around the old place to sort of liven it up. I persuaded her that she was lonely, and I got her to promise that she'd engage anybody I sent up as companion. By the time you've been there a month—"

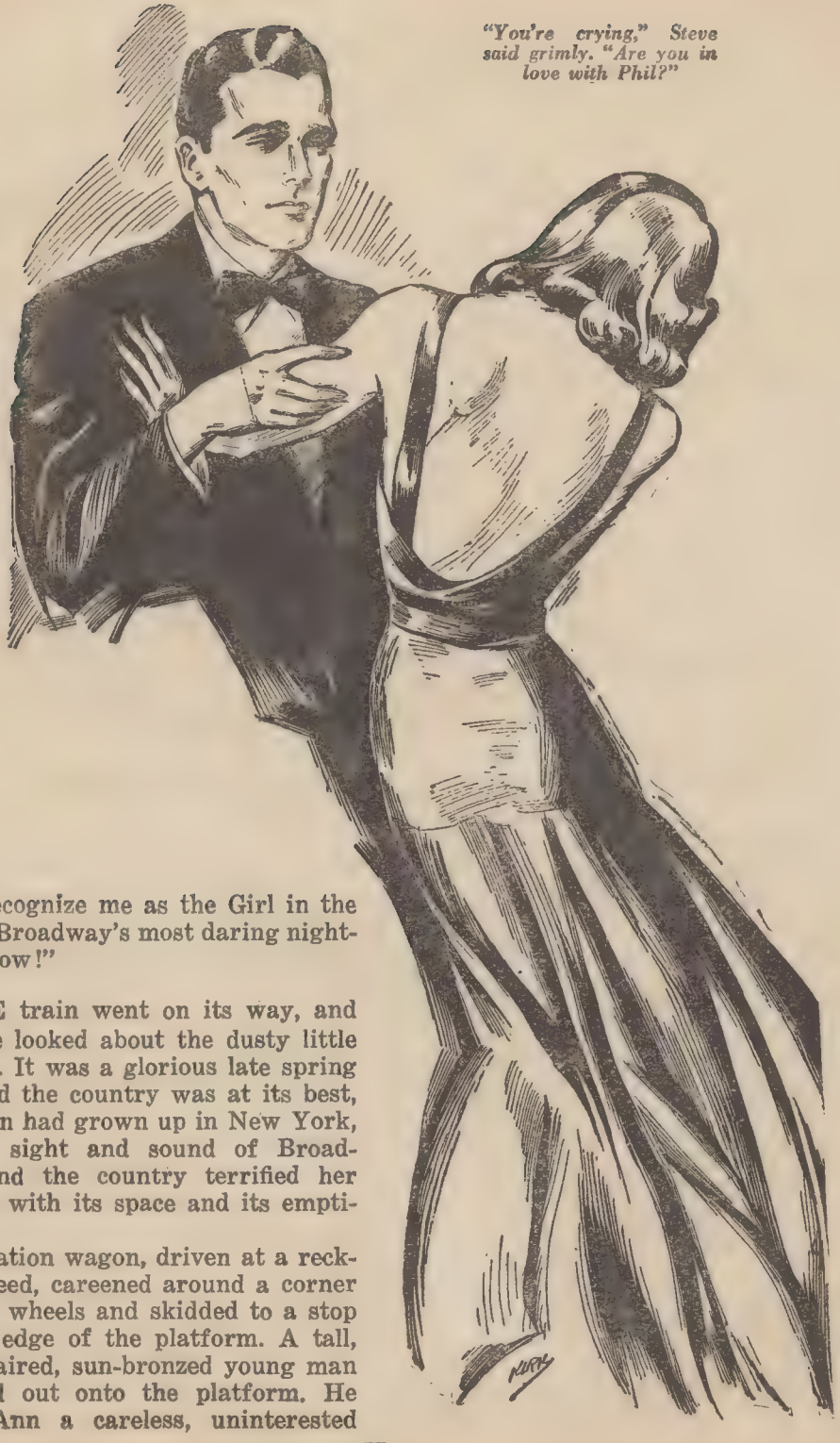
"A month!" Ann wailed. "But, Phil, I thought we were going to be married a month from today!"

"Make it two weeks then," Phil yielded swiftly. "In two weeks you'll have the old girl eating out of your hand—she'll be so mad about you that she'll be tickled pink at having you as her niece. Sweet, I wouldn't ask it except that—well, it would be a shame to have all that money and that beautiful old place fall into the hands of a no-good like Steve Ainslee, my esteemed cousin—the family skeleton."

In the end, of course, she yielded. She could refuse Phil nothing when he held her close in his arms and his kisses burned her lips. She even let him supervise the wardrobe that she was to take with her, although she groaned at the nondescript things he selected as befitting a secretary-companion to a lonely old lady on an ancestral estate.

She groaned even more when she saw her reflection in the narrow slit of mirror beside the window of her seat on the train as it pulled into the little country station. Her hair, brushed free of curls, was tucked into a loose pale-gold knot at the back of her neck; her oval face was entirely guiltless of make-up; she was wearing a cheap, unbecoming blue suit and a rather sad little hat.

"There's one consolation," she told herself grimly as she carried her cheap small suitcase out of the train to the station platform. "Nobody will



"You're crying," Steve said grimly. "Are you in love with Phil?"

ever recognize me as the Girl in the Pearl, Broadway's most daring night-club show!"

THE train went on its way, and she looked about the dusty little station. It was a glorious late spring day and the country was at its best, but Ann had grown up in New York, within sight and sound of Broadway and the country terrified her a little with its space and its emptiness.

A station wagon, driven at a reckless speed, careened around a corner on two wheels and skidded to a stop at the edge of the platform. A tall, dark-haired, sun-bronzed young man stepped out onto the platform. He gave Ann a careless, uninterested

glance as he passed, but a moment later he came back, paused, stared at her uncertainly, and then asked hesitantly, "Look here, you couldn't possibly be the girl I was sent here to meet, now could you?"

Somehow Ann resented him. It was that resentment that made her say haughtily more than she intended to say, "I'm Ann Driscoll, and I'm going to a place called the Cedars—if that's any of your business."

The man's eyebrows went up, and for a moment he stared at her in complete amazement. And then suddenly he began to laugh, laughter that made Ann's blue eyes burn with anger. But before she could say a word, he murmured something about having to telephone and disappeared into the station.

Plainly, Ann decided furiously, the man was insane. But when he came back a few minutes later, he was quite grave and his manner quite courteous.

"And now, Miss Driscoll, if you're ready?" he suggested politely. "I'm Steve Ainslee, and I've been sent to drive you to the Cedars."

Steve Ainslee! This was the man whom Phil had called the family skeleton. This was the black sheep; the last they had heard from him, Phil had said, he'd been on the beach somewhere in the South Seas! Yet here he was, waiting to drive her to the Cedars, the home of the rich old aunt who, according to Phil, couldn't abide the sight of him!

He said as he helped her into the station wagon, "I'm afraid I was pretty rude just now. But I happened to think of something funny—"

"It couldn't possibly have been me, of course?" she asked icily.

He looked down at her, his dark eyes dancing a little.

"Perish the thought!" he said. "But if you'll forgive my frankness, I expected somebody—well, a lot different. I mean—well, Aunt Susan said Phil, my cousin, was selecting a companion for her—and Phil's a pretty fancy picker when it comes to girls—"

"And you thought he'd pick someone a lot prettier and smarter looking than I am?" Ann snapped. "Maybe I was mistaken—I didn't know I was being chosen for a—for a—beauty chorus. I thought it was as companion for an old lady."

"Aunt Susan needs a companion just about as much as I do—which is not at all," said Steve sharply, and then caught himself up. "Sorry—if you need a job and Phil could make one for you, that's surely no business of mine, is it?"

"I don't see how it could be," answered Ann furiously.

So she wasn't pretty enough to interest this—this beachcomber, was she? And he'd have liked her to be smarter looking? Remembering the beautiful dresses and hats and coats, the piles of cobwebby underwear and stockings, the slippers, the negligees in the big cedar-lined closet in her smart New York apartment, she wanted to weep. And for a moment she was bitter against Phil for sending her up here looking like a scarecrow.

But after all, she told herself, she was being pretty much a fool to let Steve Ainslee get under her skin like this—who was Steve Ainslee, anyway? Just a wandering no-good, according to Phil. She had come up here for a purpose, Ann reminded herself—to win an old-fashioned, prim woman's liking before that woman learned that Ann had earned her living for a considerable length of time as a chorus girl, that she was currently featured as a girl who appeared nightly, garbed with extreme sketchiness, as the occupant of a huge transparent globe that masqueraded as a pearl. If Steve Ainslee could see her as the Girl in the Pearl, she told herself grimly, he'd change his mind about her beauty and her smartness.

HE car turned in at a grilled-iron gate and drove along a graveled drive to a house, old, gracious, spreading, with a breath-taking view of hills and valley beyond it.

When they went inside, Steve led Ann to the long drawing room. An old woman in black, sitting in a deep chair, looked up from her book as Steve and Ann came in. She studied Ann with keen, shrewd dark eyes.

"So you're my new companion," she observed, when Steve had introduced Ann. "And you're a friend of Phil's? I thought he usually went in for the pretty, flashy type of girl." There was frank skepticism in the words, and Ann's face burned.

"A friend of a friend of his," she said awkwardly. "My friend heard about this job and—well, got Mr. Ainslee to send me up here. Of course, if you'd rather not have me—"

"Oh, no, I'm sure you'll do very nicely, my dear," said the old lady and rang a bell. When the old butler came in, she said briskly, "Evans, this is Miss Driscoll, my new companion. Show her to her room, please. I'll see you at dinner, my dear—seven o'clock."

As she left the room, Ann knew that Steve and Aunt Susan were watching her, and she felt awkward and ill at ease and on the verge of tears. Her room was large, comfortable, well-furnished, with a private bath and a small dressing room. An elderly maid was unpacking Ann's miserable little suitcase, and Ann's face burned as the maid shook out the cheap, sleazy, unbecoming garments and hung them neatly away in a closet that could easily have held three times as many clothes.

Dressed for dinner in the cheap blue crepe that Phil had assured her was perfect for the Cedars, Ann looked at her neatly brushed hair, at her face that looked pale and lost without lipstick, rouge or eye shadow. She was doing this for Phil, she reminded herself, but as she went down the stairs, she told herself grimly that if Steve Ainslee made just one funny crack about the way she looked, she'd sock him! After that she felt a little better about the whole thing.

Dinner was simple, well-cooked, delicious. Afterward they went into the drawing room for coffee, and there, at Aunt Susan's request, Steve sat down at the beautiful old square piano, and melody flowed forth from beneath his fingers, such melody as Ann had never heard. It stirred her deeply and brought the sharp sting of tears to her eyes. When Steve turned to her suddenly, she could not conceal her soft, tremulous mouth or the tears that glinted on her lashes.

He stared at her for a moment, as though startled and touched. And then he said quietly, simply, "Thank you. I've never had a more sincere compliment."

"Steve could have been a great pianist," said Aunt Susan over her knitting, "but he always wanted to see what was over the rim of the world, so he just became a wanderer. It's too bad his mother left him enough money to live on comfortably—if he'd had to work he might have amounted to something in life."

Steve grinned, completely untouched by the criticism. A little later, Ann said good night and went up to bed. She was tired and confused from the jumbled emotions of the day.

IN the morning she found Steve in the breakfast room, and though he greeted her politely and studied her curiously, he seemed indisposed to conversation. She was glad to escape to Aunt Susan, whom she found busily at work at a huge, old-fashioned flat-top desk in her sitting room.

Aunt Susan looked up at her as

though annoyed. "Well, well," she said briskly, "what is it, my dear? I'm quite busy."

"I want to help you—after all, that's why I'm here."

"Help me?" Aunt Susan looked even more annoyed. "Oh, run away and amuse yourself somewhere—I haven't time to talk to you this morning. I'll see you at four—tea in the library."

Outside the closed door, Ann stood for a moment in indecision, until Steve came up to her. "I told you she didn't need a secretary or a companion," he said coolly. "She's the most self-sufficient person alive."

"Then why did she want me up here?" demanded Ann.

"Frankly, I don't think she did," Steve said mildly. "I think the whole thing was Phil's idea—it sounds like him."

Ann caught her breath, and then she cried rashly, "If you think he sent me up here for any purpose except to be—helpful—"

"I'm not quite sure just what I do think about you," Steve said quietly, with an unexpected sternness in his voice, and before she could answer, he turned and walked away.

CHAPTER II

IT was a long, extremely tiresome day. At last, at four o'clock, in the library before the small open fire that the afternoon chill made welcome, Ann faced Aunt Susan and Steve.

"It's really quite simple, my dear," Aunt Susan was saying. "My nephew Phil is a very—er—impulsive young man. He's extremely susceptible to pretty girls. At the present moment, I'm very much afraid that he's involved with a girl who is—well—not quite nice."

"And that's a miracle of understatement, if ever I heard one," Steve said grimly, looking straight at Ann. "Not quite nice! She's a designing, shameless hussy, if there ever was one, a Broadway show girl who appears nightly clad in nothing at all more substantial than a huge transparent globe—in an act called 'The Girl in the Pearl.'"

"Oh, well, Steve, perhaps she's not altogether bad!" Aunt Susan protested. "Perhaps she has to earn a living—"

Ann was very still, her hands clenched hard in her lap. They knew about Phil's interest in the Girl in the Pearl. But they didn't know that Ann was that girl. She checked her sudden, hysterical desire to laugh.

"Anyway," Aunt Susan went on, "Steve and I thought it would be nice if while Phil is at home for the next week or so, there was a pretty girl, a nice girl here for him to—well, to play around with. If we could convince him that nice girls are just as attractive as the other kind—"

Ann waited for whatever was coming. She didn't dare try to speak. Steve and Aunt Susan studied her intently for a moment, and then Aunt Susan went on briskly, "So that was the reason Steve and I thought it would be nice if you kept Phil amused while he's here."

Ann gasped and looked up swiftly. "I? But—you've both very carefully implied that I'm far from pretty! Phil wouldn't give me a second glance."

"I think he would—several of them," Steve said unexpectedly. "And I never said you weren't pretty—you are, very, in a fresh, clean, wholesome sort of way."

"Thanks," said Ann curtly, "for practically nothing."

"You'll be very lovely in the sort of clothes I've had sent up for you," Aunt Susan went on. "My maid, Martha, is a marvel at make-up and hair-dos and things like that, and she's delighted at the prospect of having someone worthy of her skill to work on after years of waiting on me. In your room you'll find some clothes

I had sent from town—Martha can alter them if necessary. You won't mind helping an old woman bring a straying nephew back to his rightful place, will you?"

Ann fought for a moment against her tangled emotions. She felt Steve's eyes upon her—cool, amused, satirical, as though he were laughing at her, laughing at the idea that a dowdy little frump such as she knew she looked could possibly attract any man, especially one with such a roving eye as Phil was supposed to possess!

"I'm sure she won't," Steve said grimly.

For a moment Ann's angry eyes fought with his that were amused and faintly contemptuous. Then she looked away and said hastily, "I'll—be glad to be of any service."

"Thank you, my dear," said Aunt Susan pleasantly. "And now Martha is waiting for you in your room. Phil will be here for dinner, and we want to make an impression on him."

It was a frank dismissal, and Ann turned without a word and went up to her room. A little later she heard the sound of the station wagon driving away—to meet Phil, of course.

It was a crazy sort of business, she told herself hysterically as she stood before the mirror while Martha adjusted a gown to her really lovely figure. She had come here in the hope of winning Aunt Susan's confidence so that Aunt Susan wouldn't mind so much the discovery that she was The Girl in the Pearl. Aunt Susan had known all along of Phil's entanglement with that girl, and now Ann was being hired to lure Phil away from the girl, and she herself was that girl!

Her face burned at the memory of Steve's description, "A designing, shameless hussy." She hated Steve Ainslee with all her heart, and some day, she promised herself, she would get even with him for his laughter, his contempt, his little stinging remarks.

She heard the station wagon drive up, voices in the hall as Phil and Steve separated to dress for dinner. And when she went down the stairs a little later, she carried her head high because she knew she had never looked more beautiful. Her soft, pale gold hair curled about her face that was artfully touched with make-up; her suave blue gown revealed the exquisite lines of her figure.

She came into the long drawing room. Phil, dressed for dinner, was alone before the fireplace. When he saw her, he gave a little cry of delight; then he frowned as his eyes took in the dress and her make-up and her hair.

His kiss was hurried, almost guilty. Maybe that was why there was little or no thrill in it. But he pushed her away from him almost at once and said sternly, "This isn't playing the game, Ann. You were supposed to keep up the masquerade until you won Aunt Susan over."

"This"—Ann's little gesture indicated her hair and gown and make-up—"is Aunt Susan's idea. I'm supposed to lure you away from that awful girl you're so mad about in New York—the show girl who dances in the pearl—remember?"

"What?" Phil was incredulous.

"It's the truth," Ann said swiftly. "She wants you to find out how attractive a really nice girl can be—that's me—and she hopes the nice girl can lure you away from that awful creature in New York—but she doesn't know I'm the creature."

"Well, of all things!" Suddenly Phil began to laugh. "What a situation! If we work this right, Ann, she'll dance at our wedding, and I'll still be her favorite nephew."

"She seems to like Steve pretty well," Ann pointed out.

Phil frowned. "What's he doing here, by the way? You could have knocked me over with a feather when

I found him waiting for me at the station," he answered.

"That goes double," Ann assured him grimly. "You said he was beachcombing in the South Seas."

"The last I heard of him, he was," said Phil, then sharply, "Be careful—I hear somebody."

STEVE came in with Aunt Susan. Phil's face darkened a little as he saw the way Aunt Susan leaned on Steve's arm.

"Oh, Phil—I'm so glad you're here!" Aunt Susan offered her soft old cheek for Phil's kiss. "I see you and Miss Driscoll have been getting acquainted. I do hope you can pay us a real visit this time."

"Don't worry about that." Phil's eyes met Steve's grimly. "You'll probably have to burn the house down to get rid of me."

Steve was looking at Ann as though he'd never set eyes on her before. Beneath his startled, intent scrutiny, Ann's color deepened, and absurdly, she couldn't quite meet his eyes.

"My dear, how nice you look!" Aunt Susan said to Ann.

"Another miracle of understatement," Steve commented. "She's—the loveliest thing I ever saw!"

Phil moved a step toward Ann. For a moment he and Steve looked at each other, and in the swift, angry glance they exchanged, Ann saw that they were enemies and could never be anything else.

When dinner was announced, Aunt Susan started to take Steve's arm, but instantly Phil was beside her, offering his arm. With a gentle smile, Aunt Susan accepted it. As they went toward the dining room, Steve smiled down at Ann and said lightly, "If I may have the honor—"

Dinner was half over when there was the sound of wheels in the drive. A moment later the dining-room door opened. The loveliest girl Ann had ever seen stood there.

"Hello, darlings!" The girl was red-haired, exquisite in a beige suit with a sable scarf around her shoulders. "I'm so glad to be back! Please be very glad to see me! I've missed all of you so!"

"Why, Marcia—my dear!" Aunt Susan held out welcoming hands. "How nice to have you home again!"

Marcia bent and kissed her. Her eyes swung swiftly to Phil, and she said, her voice soft, a little shaken, "Hello, Phil!"

Phil came swiftly to her and Marcia stood on tiptoe and kissed him. Ann looked up suddenly to find Steve's eyes upon her with a curious intentness that startled her; had she betrayed her sharp little stab of jealousy at that kiss? Had Steve read more than she was prepared to have him see in her eyes?

"Steve dear—it's not really you!" Marcia was still clinging possessively to Phil, but she held out one lovely, jewel-nailed hand to Steve. "I thought you were on the other side of the world. What are you doing here, of all places?"

"Well, after all, a guy gets homesick now and then," said Steve, smiling.

"You? Homesick? I don't believe it!" Marcia scoffed gaily. And then her eyes fell on Ann. Some of the warm, eager gaiety went out of her face. Her voice was faintly frosted as she said, "Oh—I didn't know you had a guest."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Marcia, this is Ann Driscoll, my new secretary-companion," said Aunt Susan composedly. "Ann, this is Marcia, my godchild, who, I hope, has come to spend some time with us."

"How do you do?" said Marcia formally. And then to Aunt Susan, "Thank you, I'd love to stay a while. Funny, after six weeks in Reno, I seem to have a terrific fondness for this part of the country and for all of you!"

A place had been set for her at the table. She had had dinner on the train, she told them, but she had cof-

fee with them and chattered gaily of things that were, naturally, entirely strange to Ann. Ann began to have the unpleasant feeling that she had completely faded out of the scene.

After dinner Aunt Susan said gently, "Phil, why don't you show Ann the view from the west terrace in the moonlight? I'm sure she'd enjoy it."

Phil rose without too much grace, and he and Ann walked out of the room. Ann felt Steve's slightly sardonic gaze upon her.

OUTSIDE, Phil said, "See here, Ann, we're going to have to watch our step. If I seem to fall for you too suddenly, Aunt Susan and Steve are sure to be suspicious. And if they ever discovered the truth about you—"

"After all, the truth isn't so shocking," Ann snapped crossly. "I appear in a night-club revue wearing what the audience fondly believes is nothing much or less than that! But you and I both know that I'm completely covered—and anyway, just because I'm a night-club girl, doesn't mean I'm—a hussy! I'm probably just as respectable, in my own quaint way, as Marcia—and who is she, by the way? And why did she kiss you so warmly when she arrived? What's there between you?"

She sounded shrewish and knew it, but she was fighting tears, for some silly reason, and she didn't want him to know it. And suddenly she hated the country, the quiet, the peace; she hated the beautiful old house behind her and all that it held. She wanted Broadway and the clamor of Times Square, which had been her lullaby all her life.

"Marcia—well, she and Steve and I grew up together," Phil said reminiscently. "She and I were—well, childhood sweethearts, I suppose. And then she married a multimillionaire and that was that. They fought like cat and dog and finally she went to Reno and got a divorce. And—well, that's about all."

"Except that now she's here, probably with a terrific cash settlement from her multimillionaire—she looks exactly the type to see to that," snapped Ann. "And I suppose you two expect to take up just where you left off before the multimillionaire came in?"

Phil looked down at her, frowning a little. "Are you by any chance jealous?"

"Well, what do you think?" Ann demanded hotly.

"I think you're being a little fool," said Phil tartly. "After all, you're my fiancée, aren't you? Would I have gone to all the trouble of getting you up here where my aunt could get to know you and like you if I hadn't intended to marry you?"

"If you really loved me, you'd have married me first and brought me up here later," Ann said recklessly.

"What—and let Aunt Susan leave all her money to charity? That would have been sensible, wouldn't it?"

For a moment they scowled at each other. The dark, angry look in his eyes frightened Ann. She stood close to him, her heart stricken with a momentary flash of terror as his arms hesitated a moment before closing about her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I—didn't mean to be unpleasant. It's only that—I love you so much—and—and—I'm jealous, I suppose."

It was a completely humble plea. Phil's anger melted, and his arms tightened around her, and he kissed her hard. It was one of those kisses that made her heart thrill with happiness, and she tried to creep even closer in his arms, glowingly at peace with the world.

And then music came to them, the sound of a piano magnificently played. Ann drew away from Phil's arms, fearful of missing even the tiniest sound of that beauty. Phil let her go with frank reluctance, scowling down at her enchanted face.

Neither of them heard Marcia until she said out of the darkness behind them, "Well, here you are! I was sent in search of you. You were gone such a terribly long time."

Ann said something indistinct and brushed past Marcia on her way into the house. The music died with a great crashing chord. Ann had reached the foot of the stairs before Steve came out and spoke to her. She didn't know what he said; she only knew that the sound of his voice, on top of the havoc his music had wrought in her emotions, was too much for her. She was suddenly in tears as she sped up the stairs to her own room.

THE next morning when she came down to the dining room and found Steve there at breakfast, she had a childish inclination to hang back, unwilling almost to face him.

"Oh, hello." Steve held her chair for her. "I had an idea you were the type that couldn't sleep through anything so swell as a morning like this. Hurry up and finish your breakfast and I'll take you for a walk in the woods."

"You're too kind," said Ann, and hated herself for trying to be nasty.

But Steve chose to ignore it, and when they had finished breakfast, they set off along a path across the meadow, pausing at last to rest at the top of a hill. Ann sat on a flat moss-covered rock, while Steve stretched himself beside her, chewing on a blade of grass, his eyes on her with a curious look that made her blush self-consciously.

"See here," said Steve suddenly. "You were in tears last night when you went up to your room. You hadn't been quarreling with Phil, had you? But no, of course you hadn't—you haven't known him long enough to quarrel with him, have you? You only met last night, didn't you?"

Ann was very still for a moment. Strangely, it was very hard to lie to him. The masquerade that had seemed amusing when she and Phil had first planned it, and even more amusing when it had taken its present turn of having her lure Phil away from the "not quite nice" girl she was supposed to be, didn't seem amusing at all this morning. It seemed rather cheap to deceive a frail, sweet old lady like Aunt Susan and to lie in cold blood to a man whose dark eyes looked at her as sincerely as Steve's were looking at her now.

"Then if you didn't quarrel with Phil," Steve said after a moment, "it must have been my music that upset you. Was it as bad as all that?"

"It wasn't bad at all, and you know it," said Ann swiftly. "It was—glorious—and it's disgraceful that a man with your ability isn't doing something with such a gift—"

She stopped, then went on in a more casual tone, "Sorry—it's none of my business, of course. It's just that—well, I'm known to be a pushover for really good music."

Steve said quietly, "It's odd that you've never done anything with such a keen appreciation of real music."

"Oh, but I have—I've studied music since I could begin earning enough money to pay for lessons—only I don't play—I dance—" She stopped short, realizing she had said too much.

Steve nodded. "Watching your walk, your gestures, I knew you must be a dancer," he said quietly. "How does it happen that you're here working as companion-secretary, instead of in New York hunting work as a dancer?"

Ann sat very still for a long tense moment, then she said, "Well, companion-secretaries eat much more regularly than—show girls out of work—not that I mean I was a show girl—"

"No, of course not. You're a dancing student, aren't you?" Steve said mildly, and now he wasn't looking at her at all. "I have some friends in

show business in New York—maybe I could help you."

Ann was on her feet instantly, brushing pine-needles from her skirt. "Oh, no, you mustn't! I mean, you mustn't bother. I—I wouldn't want to—to—make good through—well, through pull and influence. I—I'd—rather make it the hard way."

Steve nodded. The look in his eyes was warm and admiring now. "You would," he said quietly. "Shall we go back?"

Ann hated herself as she walked beside him down the hill and back to the house. Somehow she couldn't bear to lie to Steve Ainslee. Unreasonably, she blamed Phil for having gotten her into this situation. He should have married her anyway without trying to win his aunt over.

She caught her thoughts guiltily away from that direction. She had been in love with Phil for more than a year now; she couldn't begin finding fault with him, doubting his love. Either she had to believe in Phil and the reality of his love, or else things just wouldn't have any meaning any more.

CHAPTER III

UT the next few days were very difficult for Ann. Phil was frankly absorbed in Marcia, and Marcia's eyes softened and her voice warmed when she was near him. Watching them, Ann knew a moment of panic during which she wondered, "What happens next?"

Marcia had been slightly amazed and incredulous when she had learned that Ann did not play bridge.

"But, Miss Driscoll, what do you do with your spare time?" she exclaimed one night as the four of them were about to settle down for the nightly game that Aunt Susan loved.

"Well, frankly, I've never had enough spare time to worry about, so I've done all right without bridge," Ann answered a trifle tartly, and went out into the garden.

Behind her she heard Marcia saying lightly, "Where on earth did you ever find her, Aunt Susan? She's really a museum piece."

"I didn't find her—Phil did," Aunt Susan said comfortably.

Outside, Ann paused to listen, quite frankly and unashamedly. She heard Phil say casually, "She's a friend of a friend of mine. She needed a job and—well, Aunt Susan needed a companion."

"So that's the way it was!" There was mockery in Marcia's voice.

Ann didn't wait to hear any more. She fled down the garden path to the summerhouse. She could no longer keep back the tears. She had counted on Phil, and he was letting her down. They had agreed to pretend, but Phil seemed to be doing more than that; he seemed to be eager to seize any opportunity to deny her completely.

There was a footstep on the graveled path. A man came toward her. The moonlight was behind him, and she could not tell whether it was Phil or Steve until he spoke. Then the hope that had leaped in her heart stumbled and died. Phil hadn't come in search of her, to hold her in his arms and kiss away her tears. It was Steve. He put his hands on her arms, held her as she turned away.

"You're crying," he said grimly. "Are you in love with Phil?"

"Well, of course—we're going to be mar—" She put shaking fingers against her lips, but it was too late; the words had been said.

"You've known him less than a week, yet you're so mad about him that you're out here crying because he's making a play for Marcia—and you're expecting to marry him! Okay, then, if that's the way you want it. You wait here."

He turned and went swiftly back to the house. Ann waited, shaken, disturbed, a little uneasy. A few min-

utes later a man came toward her again. This time it was Phil.

"See here, Ann, what's this all about?" he demanded peevishly. "What have you been saying to Steve? You're not playing the game by hinting that you and I have known each other before."

"It seems that Aunt Susan and Steve expect me to lure you away from shameless hussies," said Ann curtly, "and apparently Steve agrees with me that the play Marcia is making for you isn't exactly what could be called ladylike."

Phil said sharply, "That's a despicable thing to say, Ann. Marcia's had a miserable time—and after all, I've known her all my life. Why shouldn't we have things to say to each other?"

"You had things to say to me once—such as, 'Will you marry me?' Remember?"

"Of course I remember—I also remember that you promised to come up here and behave like a lady until my aunt learned to be fond of you," Phil said sharply. "But you seem to be chiefly concerned about Steve's feelings for you."

"Somehow I seem to have a feeling that if Steve wanted to marry a girl he wouldn't care whether his wealthy aunt approved or not," Ann flung at him.

Phil looked at her curiously. "But it wouldn't make any difference to Steve's prospects whether Aunt Susan approved of his marriage or not," he answered grimly. "Steve doesn't happen to be Aunt Susan's heir—I do! And if you think I'm going to throw away my chances of inheriting the Ainslee estates just for a silly whim—"

ANN caught her breath as though he had struck her, and for a moment they were still, staring at each other in the moonlight. It was Ann who broke first. She stumbled toward him, crying his name in a little soft, shaken voice that was blurred with tears. She was too shaken to realize that his arms closed about her almost reluctantly, though there was ardor in the kiss he set upon her soft mouth.

Then he held her a little away from him and looked down at her sternly.

"Now, see here, Ann, this quarreling has got to stop," he told her sternly. "Aunt Susan likes you—she said so tonight at the bridge table. If you play your cards right, everything will work out just the way we've planned it. You can't let me down now."

"No, darling, of course I won't let you down," Ann said shakily. "I'm sorry I was angry, only—well, there's something about Marcia that rubs me the wrong way. But I'll be good, honestly I will."

"That's the girl," said Phil, frankly relieved, and led her back to the house, where he said good night to her quite formally for fear the others might be listening.

She found it hard to go to sleep, probably because she had rather a lot to think about; chiefly Steve, it developed. He had sent Phil out to the summerhouse after her. She couldn't quite put Steve out of her mind; his music affected her deeply; she couldn't forget his dark, attractively homely face. He'd take good care of the girl he married. Determinedly she told herself to stop thinking and go to sleep.

SHE saw nothing of Steve when she came down to breakfast the next morning. She breakfasted alone and went out for a walk. Time hung very heavily on her hands here in the country. She had nothing to do; more often than not she was alone. Born and bred in the great, sprawling city, accustomed to hard work all her life, she found that the idleness and loneliness got on her nerves.

When she returned to the house, the moment she entered the long, lovely drawing room she knew something had happened. Aunt Susan's black

eyes were snapping, her crumpled soft cheeks were tinged with color.

Steve made a move to go as Ann came into the room, but Aunt Susan said crisply, "You will stay please, Steve! Since you've been in on this from the very beginning, I want you here at the finish."

Then Aunt Susan turned to Ann. "My dear," she said, "here's a check for a month's salary, plus a bonus which I am sure you can use. I shan't need you any longer—you've accomplished the purpose for which I had you brought up here."

"I—don't think I quite understand," Ann stammered.

"Phil and Marcia are married," Steve said with brutal frankness. "They eloped last night. We discovered it an hour ago."

Ann caught her breath and stood very still, quite rigid. Steve's eyes did not leave her face. Neither did Aunt Susan's.

"But I'm sure you don't really mind," said Aunt Susan crisply. "After all, you can undoubtedly get your job back—and girls with lovely figures and no scruples about showing them off in night clubs are never out of work for long."

Ann put her hand on the edge of the table for support. There could be, of course, only one meaning behind Aunt Susan's words. She knew the truth about Ann—that Ann was the Girl in the Pearl in the Club Neptune's revue.

"You—you know," she said.

"We know," said Aunt Susan, and her black eyes flashed. "I knew that Phil was—er—involved with a girl in a New York night club. When Steve came home, I told him about it. Steve had ways of finding out who the girl was—and once he had located her, I made him take me into town to see your performance. It was—well, perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but to me it was shocking!"

Suddenly Ann was furious. "Oh, it was, was it?" she said harshly. "Well, let me tell you something. Starving to death, being half frozen in winter, living in cheap, hideous rooms that you share with three or four other girls, spending long hours in agents' offices, listening to all sorts of proposals, watching decent, honest girls who are friends of yours give in to those proposals, just because they're hungry and cold and desperate—well, those things are a lot more shocking than dancing as I do at the Club Neptune! Of course, you wouldn't know about things like being hungry and terrified—"

Aunt Susan was on her feet. "I think this has gone quite far enough," she said icily. "The station wagon will be ready to take you to the train as soon as you're packed."

She sailed out of the room. Ann stood very still, staring straight before her.

STEVE said after a moment, his voice quiet, "I'm terribly sorry."

Ann whirled on him furiously. "Oh, you are? Well, that's just dandy! Thanks a lot! You kicked my life into a cocked hat—you framed me—"

"You were going to frame Aunt Susan," Steve cut in almost gently.

Ann's anger subsided a little. Before she could manage to answer him, Steve went on, "I—well, I admired you from the first. I thought you were—well, about the loveliest thing I'd ever seen and that Phil should be kicked into the middle of next week for not rushing you off to a minister the first moment you said yes, instead of fooling around waiting for Aunt Susan's approval. That's what I'd have done."

Ann drew a long hard breath. "Then you knew from the moment I stepped off the train that I was—the Girl in the Pearl? That's why you l-l-laughed at me for that awful get-up I had on!"

Steve's eyes twinkled for a moment, then he sobered. "It was funny at first—your coming up here all nicely disguised as a very sedate young thing—but the more I thought

of it and what you were plotting—trying to worm yourself into the affections of a tired old woman by pretending to be sweet and innocent—the more I wanted to wring your pretty neck!"

Ann nodded grimly, "It's all becoming quite clear now," she said after a moment. "I suppose hiring me to lure Phil away from—from the night-club girl was—your idea. It sounds like you!"

"Thank you," said Steve as though she had offered him a very pleasant compliment. "I'm afraid it was. You see, when Aunt Susan discovered the trick you and Phil were trying to put over on her, her first impulse was to denounce you and drive you off her doorstep. She was so hurt that Phil should do a thing like that—plot and scheme and contrive to get such a girl into his aunt's home—but after you arrived, she and I turned the tables on you."

"And I suppose you're very proud of yourself now that Phil has thrown me over."

"My dear, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart," Steve said firmly. "It's the best thing that could ever have happened to you. He would never have made you happy—he wasn't the man for you. I knew that—"

"Oh, you did? And I suppose you've an idea about who would be the man for me?"

She was amazed at the sudden light that came into Steve's eyes. "Of course, darling—I am—didn't you know?" he said pleasantly, yet there was a wealth of feeling in his voice that shook her. "I knew almost the moment you walked in here that you were for me and I was for you—and that Phil was just—a mistake."

"Well!" gasped Ann inadequately, and made a little motion, as though to clutch something solid and substantial in a world gone mad.

THE something solid and substantial turned out to be Steve's shoulder, for somehow all of a sudden his arms were around her, and he was holding her close. Ann was dazed and bewildered by the storm of emotion that shook her. Phil's arms around her had thrilled her, but this being in Steve's arms was something completely different. It was as though all her life had moved steadily and inevitably toward this perfect moment.

She tilted her lovely pale-gold head and looked up at him, wide-eyed, shaken, her soft mouth tremulous. And Steve said something that was a husky, shaken endearment and bent his head and set his mouth on hers. It seemed to Ann that her heart became a dancing star, and quicksilver ran along her veins, and an ecstasy beyond anything she had ever known or dreamed filled her.

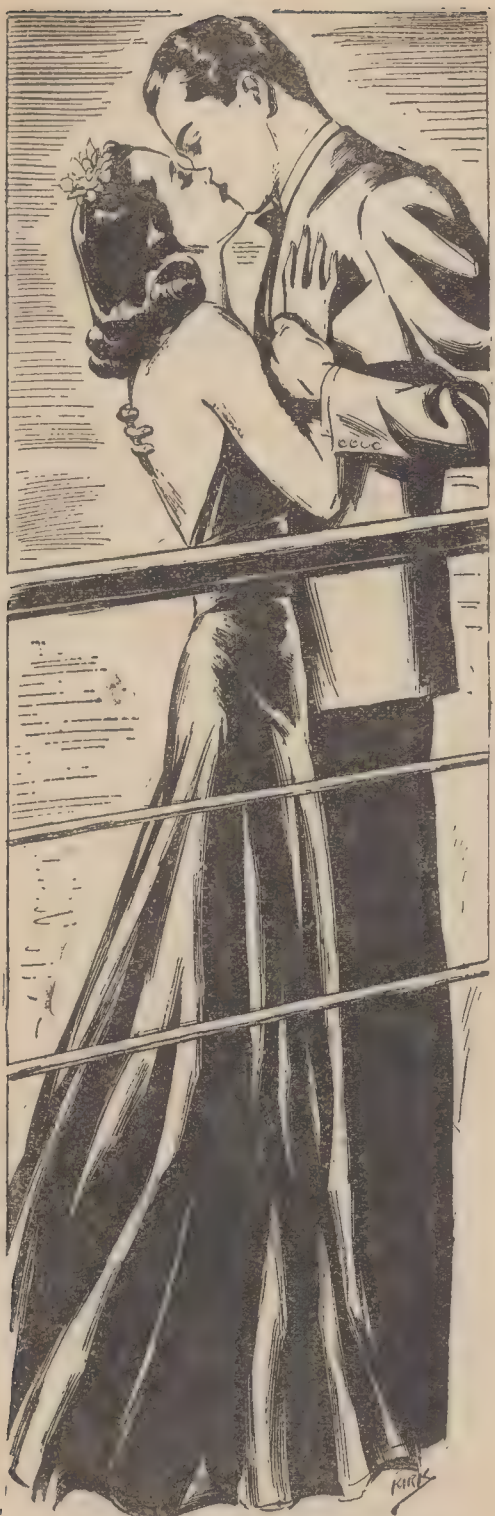
"Oh, Steve!" she whispered.

"Of course," said Steve, as though she had asked him a question. "See what I mean? I knew it was going to be like this with us that first night when you wept over my playing—that was the night I agreed to Aunt Susan's plan to send for Marcia and give her a chance at Phil. Now that Marcia's got a lot of money and can afford to marry anybody she wants, she chose Phil, of course. But I had to be sure first that you weren't going to be hurt—so I played for you—and you cried, and I knew you were meant for me."

Ann put both shaking hands to her face for a moment, and through her shaken fingers she whispered, "But—this is all so—so—crazy! I've been in love with Phil so long—and now all of a sudden he's gone, and I don't mind, and you're here and I seem to be—well, pretty crazy about you. It—it just doesn't make sense."

Steve laughed, and his arms tightened about her. "Who wants to make sense? I'd rather make love to you for the rest of my life. I'm going to marry you now—you've got to belong to me. Oh, Ann, you're so sweet—I'm mad about you! Kiss me, sweet."

Ann did. And it was heaven!



"I like girls like you—" he whispered, "girls who know that a shipboard romance doesn't mean an engagement ring."

The Kisses He Forgot

By Allyn Harris

ERIN was the type who when she loved a man told him so. It was the wrong thing to do, of course. But she had no way of knowing. Aunt Philomena had kept her in a convent school in France until the war had brought her cloistered existence to a close. She had met Michael coming over on the boat.

She had fallen in love with him instantly. She couldn't help herself. He was everything she and the other girls in the school had dreamed a man should be. They had surreptitiously clipped pictures from smuggled American movie magazines, and talked about their heroes in hushed whispers.

Erin wished that the girls could see Michael. Everything about him was exciting—his tallness, the broad shoulders, the mocking, handsome mouth and the cool, take-it-or-leave-it gray eyes, the way he wore his careless tweeds, and the fact that he had been over in the thick of the fighting in France and the bombing in London as a war correspondent for an American paper.

It was perfectly natural for Michael to notice Erin. She was the prettiest girl on the boat. She would have

She Fell in Love with the Kind of Man who Kissed and Forgot

been the prettiest girl on any boat. She was small and slim and curved in in the right places, with blue eyes, a tempting mouth and soft black curls. Michael always noticed those things.

But when he kissed her, slowly and with technique, she said, "I love you. I would have died if you hadn't loved me, too. I've wanted you to take me in your arms and kiss me. I've wanted it ever since the first night you sat across from me at dinner. I thought to myself, 'This is Fate. It's the kind of thing I read about and always knew would happen to me—love at first sight.' "

Because her head was buried on Michael's shoulder, she couldn't see his eyes. They were astonished and amused and a little frightened, because, to Michael, kissing a girl didn't mean that he loved her. He'd kissed girls in every country in the world and every State in the Union—and that's as far as it went. Michael had no wish to be tied down. He liked his life just the way it was—adventurous and exciting and free.

So he said a little desperately, "Oh, come now, Erin, you mustn't kid me like that. I might take you seriously and think you meant it. We're having fun together, though, aren't we? I like girls like you—girls who know that a shipboard romance doesn't mean an engagement ring."

Erin's head came off his shoulder, and Erin's eyes, beneath their long black lashes, stared at him wildly. And then slowly she understood. This wasn't the romance she had dreamed about—it wasn't love at first sight, not on Michael's part at least. He was trying to tell her kindly that she had been a little fool, Erin thought dully. And she knew now that she had. All the dreams she had built around Michael. The nights she had lain awake in her stuffy little berth after she had left him, reliving everything he had said, every glance he had given her, every time his hand had brushed hers or caught and held it! What a silly little fool she had been!

Well, now she knew—and it wouldn't happen again, she told herself wildly. Michael had been the first young man she had had a chance to meet. She could learn a lot from Michael—and in time she'd get over this hurt, empty feeling and the burning humiliation that swept over her.

And so she pushed herself out of Michael's arms, and tried to keep her mouth from trembling by forcing a smile that she wildly hoped Michael would think was gay. "Yes, it has been fun, hasn't it?" she said, in a voice that certainly didn't sound like her own. "I've enjoyed it lots. And I'm glad you're the kind of man who can take a joke, Michael—I—joke a lot—"

She heard Michael's relieved, embarrassed laugh. She saw him reach out his hand to pull her back into his arms, but she turned and fled.

In her stateroom she threw herself on the berth, with her hot little face buried in the pillow. She remembered the first night she had met Michael. They had danced that night on the deck, under the stars, and Michael had buried his head in her curls, and she had thought in ecstasy, "This is it. Love!"

But now she thought dismally, "It seems impossible that anyone could have been as young and dumb as I was." It seemed so long ago since she had been the gay, happy, believing Erin who had danced in Michael's arms—and yet it was only nine days ago. Nine days filled with Michael. And tomorrow they would land and she would never see Michael again.

"I'm glad," she thought wildly.

But she wasn't glad. She was drained and empty, and all the sparkle seemed gone from life.

SHE stayed in her stateroom until just before the boat landed. She didn't even go to breakfast, because Michael would be there and, after last night, she didn't want to meet his eyes. She didn't want to see him again ever.

Aunt Philomena was on the pier to meet her. Aunt Philomena was an actress. She was red-headed, red-lipped and efficient. She got Erin through the customs and the red tape with a perfumed wave of her jeweled hand. Aunt Philomena was the kind who swept things along before her. She must have been quite old, Erin thought wonderingly, but she didn't seem to be. Men turned around and looked at her, and she was the kind who wouldn't have been fooled by a Michael.

"You're a pretty thing," Aunt Philomena told Erin, inspecting her closely. "But you look a little pale. I haven't seen you since you were a baby and your mother and father died. An actress doesn't have much time to bring up a child. I hope they treated you well at the school and taught you to be a lady. The bills were high enough."

"They treated me well enough," Erin said. "And I guess they taught me to be a lady—but there are a lot of other things they didn't teach me that I'll have to learn by myself. I've —I've started learning already."

But Aunt Philomena wasn't listening. She was watching a man who was striding toward them. The kind of man that women always watch. It was Michael, and he came up and caught Erin's hand and said reproachfully, "You weren't leaving without a good-by, were you? What a way to treat a pal! I waited for you for breakfast, too, but you didn't show up."

"I—I was packing," Erin said painfully, and then, of course, she had to introduce Michael to Aunt Philomena, and Aunt Philomena beamed on him and invited him to come and see them, and Michael accepted!

When they were finally settled in Aunt Philomena's car, she said thoughtfully, "That's a handsome rascal, Erin. He could break a girl's heart without half trying.

"Yes, he could," Erin murmured.

Aunt Philomena looked at her through long, beaded lashes and said casually, "But of course no smart girl would ever take a man like that seriously. You can tell by looking at him that he's not the marrying kind."

"Yes," Erin whispered. "You can tell that by looking at him."

How ashamed Aunt Philomena would be of her if she had known about last night, Erin thought bitterly. And, oh, how she hoped that Michael would have the decency not to come and see them!

Aunt Philomena lived in a penthouse high on the top of a fashionable hotel. The big living-room, with its fireplace at one end, was constantly filled with gay, laughing people. There was Peter Styles, the newest and handsomest Hollywood star, and Bill Keifer, the famous artist. There was Del Martin, who had his name on every society page, and Barr Fogal, who owned a radio station. There were lovely girls and interesting women.

The girls at school would have been thrilled to death at the whole set-up, and two weeks ago Erin would have been, too. But in the meantime, she had met Michael. It was silly, but she couldn't forget him. She kept reliving that scene in the shadows of the upper deck, and the words she had said to Michael were painted humiliatingly in her mind.

"I love you," she had said. "I would have died if you hadn't loved me, too. I've wanted you to take me in your arms and kiss me. I've wanted it ever since the first night you sat across from me at dinner. I thought to myself, 'This is Fate. It's the kind of thing I read about and always knew would happen to me—love at first sight.'."

Yes, she thought in agony, she had actually said that. It sounded like something out of the worst kind of play—the kind that Aunt Philomena and her friends laughed at, and that ran only a few nights. How Aunt

Philomena's friends would laugh at that speech!

"Oh, Erin, Erin," she thought wildly, "how could you?"

Aunt Philomena took her out shopping and bought her clothes. "This should perk you up," she told Erin. "You're still a little pale. A girl who looks like you shouldn't be that way. If you're brooding about something, snap out of it. Brooding isn't becoming to women, my dear. Men don't like it. And it's a man, of course," she ended shrewdly. "Would it by any chance be that stunning Michael person?"

"Of course not," Erin denied. But she could see that Aunt Philomena didn't believe it.

"You're just the type Peter Styles would go for if you'd give him a little encouragement," Aunt Philomena said thoughtfully. "A romance with Peter might get you a chance in the movies—or perhaps, if you didn't want a career, you could marry him."

It sounded a little cold-blooded, but Erin remembered Michael and set her pretty chin grimly. Romance wasn't the pretty, sugarlike experience she had dreamed it could be. It was a game. If you were smart, you played it the way everybody else did. That being the case, Peter Styles was as good a bet as anybody.

Her new clothes came from Aunt Philomena's favorite shops and they were gorgeous. They made Erin's young loveliness into a new and breath-taking delight. And she was learning to talk and act and think like the people in Aunt Philomena's and Michael's world talked and acted and thought—gay and brittle and casual. You never took anything too seriously. You were smart. You knew what you wanted and went after it. And she wanted Peter Styles. She wanted to show Michael—if she ever saw him again—that the whole thing had been a game with her, too. And if she never saw Michael again, that was all right, too—in fact it was even better.

BILL KEIFER painted her picture. He told her she was very beautiful and if he wasn't so much older than she was, he would have liked to marry her. She let him take her to the Velmar Plaza roof, and she saw Michael there. Michael was with a girl—a not very pretty girl with a sharp, clever face and wise blue eyes and a shabby dinner dress. Erin felt that sharp, familiar pain in her heart, and although she laughed a lot at the clever things Bill Keifer said, she was glad that they drifted on to another night spot before Michael could come over to their table.

She went around a lot. One of the gossip columnists said:

> The most popular girl in town is pretty newcomer Erin Dale, niece of the well-known actress, Philomena Dale. Erin is being rushed by practically every eligible bachelor in town, but it is rumored that Peter Styles has the favored place in her heart and that she may play opposite him in a picture.

Yes, Peter Styles was her most constant escort. Aunt Philomena was very clever at throwing them together. Peter was pretty thrilling, too, when you came right down to it. Any girl in town would have given her right arm to be rushed by Peter. He was handsome, even handsomer than Michael, and he sulked in a most satisfactory manner when Erin went out with Barr Fogel or Del Martin or Bill Keifer.

Erin figured she was pretty lucky—if only she didn't see Michael wherever she went!

And then Michael came to Aunt Philomena's apartment to see Erin. When Sara, Aunt Philomena's maid came in and said, "Mr. Michael Fields is calling on you, Miss Erin," Erin sat there in front of her dressing table and thought, "Fool! Fool! You've made your plans. You're going to marry Peter. It doesn't matter

that you don't love him. Love is a lot of hooey. It's excitement and glamour that count. You're going to marry Peter, and why should the fact that Michael Fields has come to see you, matter to you?"

She sat there until her mouth stopped trembling and her eyes were guarded. Then she got up and went to greet Michael with a cool little smile.

Michael had changed a little. The gray eyes didn't seem as mocking, and the handsome mouth was a little tired. "I came to say hello and good-by," he said somberly. "I've seen you around, and I've read about you in the papers. You're quite a girl-about-town, aren't you? It just goes to show how a guy can be fooled. I hadn't figured you out that way on the boat."

"No, you didn't, did you?" Erin said, and suddenly she was angry. Angrier than she had ever been in her life. "You figured that I was a poor little sap you could make love to to amuse yourself. Well, you make love very nicely, Mr. Michael Fields—but so do a lot of other men. Peter Styles, for instance. It's his business on the screen, and he gets paid for it. It's too bad you don't get paid for your efforts."

Michael's face was a little pale beneath his tan. "Oh, I get paid all right," he said harshly, and suddenly she was in his arms again, as she had been that night on the boat. Only this time it was different. They were both angry, and Michael's arms hurt her and Michael's lips were fierce and hard on her own.

"I get paid this way—and this—and this—" he said, kissing her until she was dizzy and limp in his arms. "Can Peter Styles love you like that, you silly little fool? Oh, yes, I'm being paid—but I've paid, too. Paid through not being able to forget you. And how I tried! I kept feeling you so little and sweet and fragrant in my arms—I kept thinking, 'She's the only real and honest person you've ever known, Mike. Grab her before she gets away. She meant it that night she said that she loved you—and you loved her, too, although you were too dumb to know it.' I've stayed away, trying to be sure. I got this assignment to go to South America. It will be filled with hardships—but I began dreaming—the first time in my life that I ever dreamed. I kept seeing you with me wherever I went—thinking of the home we'd have some day—and—"

He stopped and let her go so suddenly that she would have fallen if she hadn't clutched the table for support. "But that's out!" he said bitterly. "I knew it when I saw you tripping around town with men like Peter and Bill Keifer and the rest of that crowd. I knew then that you weren't any of the things I had made into my dream. You were just another girl. But I came today to torture myself with a last look. I'm leaving for South America tomorrow."

"You had your chance," Erin cried wildly. "You talk about your dreams! I had dreams, too—but they frightened you there on the boat. You didn't want love—you wanted free kisses—you didn't want any girl to take you seriously—"

But Michael Fields had gone. She heard Aunt Philomena's big grilled door slam behind him.

"If he'd really cared, he would have stayed," Erin thought desperately. "He would have listened—tried to sweep me off my feet. He doesn't care—not really—he couldn't—"

But all the things he had said swept back over her to torture her. Following Michael all over the world—being there when he needed her—loving him—helping him. And then some day because she loved him so greatly, he would settle down as he had said. "But he didn't mean it," she whimpered softly. "He didn't mean it or he wouldn't have left me."

SHE would be better off with Michael Fields gone. Loving him would always be torture. How could

she be sure that she would be able to hold him even if she married him?

Perhaps he would regret it and feel trapped. Oh, yes, she would be better off without him. Let him go his wild adventurous way—South America—wars—hardship and danger. It was no life for a woman. A girl would be a fool to give up a Peter Styles for a Michael Fields.

She was curled up in a miserable heap on the couch when her second caller arrived. It was a girl in a shabby suit. A girl with a sharp, clever face and wise blue eyes. The girl who had been with Michael at the Velmar Plaza! She came hurrying in before Sara had a chance to announce her.

"I'm Garda Fields, Michael's sister," she said simply. "Michael pointed you out to me. He told me, 'I'm never going to be able to forget that girl. If I find out that she isn't what I think she is, I'll never believe in anything again.' Michael is spoiled. Women have made him that way. He never wanted to be tied down. He never wanted to be serious. But he's learned his lesson now. He found a girl—and he found out he loved her too late. You're the girl. Michael would kill me if he knew I came here. But all men are children. They think they're hard-boiled and wise, but they need a woman to teach them what it's all about. A woman who can teach them without their knowing it. Michael is miserable—but he's too proud to admit it."

Erin was packing when Aunt Philomena came home.

"Where are you going?" Aunt Philomena screamed. "Peter is coming for dinner. He's leaving for Hollywood tomorrow. He told me last night he intended to ask you to marry him—and Guy Farnsworth told me he was going to give you a movie-test and if it turned out all right, he'd team you and Peter together as the great romantic couple of the screen. Peter makes such wonderful love—"

"So does Michael," Erin said happily. "What do they wear in South America, Aunt Philomena? Let me see—I must take plenty of sunburn cream and some mosquito lotion, Michael's sister said—and some sweaters and skirts and boots and riding breeches—"

"Mosquito lotion! Michael! Riding breeches!" Aunt Philomena wailed. "Erin! Are you crazy? When you have a chance to catch a man like Peter Styles?"

"I guess I am crazy," Erin admitted dreamily, "but it seems as though I have a chance to catch a man like Michael, instead."

There was a moon the next night, and two people stood on board a boat bound for South America. The man held the slim figure of the girl tightly in his arms. It might almost have been the same scene that had happened aboard another boat on a night that seemed very far away.

But now the man said huskily, "I don't deserve this happiness, darling. I don't deserve you. I almost lost you because I didn't know how sweet being married to a girl like you would be. Are you glad that you married me, Erin? Will you love me enough to put up with me and string along with me and smack me down when I get too impossible?"

And Erin remembered the thing she had said to him before—that childish, romantic speech that had been the beginning of her heartbreak. "I love you. I would have died if you hadn't loved me, too. I've wanted you to take me in your arms and kiss me. I've wanted it ever since the first night you sat across from me at dinner. I thought to myself, 'This is Fate. It's the kind of thing I read about and always knew would happen to me—love at first sight.'"

That had been the wrong answer then—but it was all right now, because every bit of it was true. Michael loved her. Nothing else mattered.

When You Meet a Man

By June Ellis

What to Do

Be your own sweet self! Airs, even though they be glamorous ones, are pretty transparent to most men, and since first impressions *do* count, no wise girl runs the risk of scaring off a potential admirer with personality fol-de-rols. Just as in clothes, the smartest thing is simplicity.

★

Even if he's the grandest person you've ever met and the two of you are literally swept off your feet, try him out on some of your girl friends. It's safe to have a flash opinion seconded—and it saves heartaches to know right from the start if he's vulnerable to other lovelies.

★

Invite him to your home, if at all possible, but be sure the first time to have other friends in. This invitation to your home is as far as you can go in letting him know you like him. Any other invitations will be up to him.

★

Find out what his interests are—baseball, politics, dancing—and get him to talk about them—and about himself. That'll be easy! And if he's especially proficient in any one thing acquaint yourself with his specialty—and he'll think you're his ideal girl.

What Not to Do

Don't make the old-fashioned mistake of being on your guard—that is, acting as if you expected his intentions to be strictly dishonorable and you just weren't "that kind of girl." He'll know whether you are or not. Everything about you from the first moment you meet will tell him.

★

Don't, in your endeavor to be pleasant, seem anxious. A very little encouragement goes a long way—if he's interested. And if he just isn't interested, there's very little you can do about it without hurting your dignity and pride—in his eyes.

★

Don't offer information about yourself—either your phone number or your state of mind, heart or social inclinations. He'll enjoy discovering whatever he wants to know about you in his own masculine way, and he'll like you for your reticence.

★

Don't pry into his life. If he wants you to know about himself, he'll tell you all in good time—and you'll probably have a hard job stopping him!

The Man She Gave Up

She Learned How to Hold Him—After Their Breakup!

CHAPTER I

COMING down the gangplank with Roger Maitland, Wendy tried to appear as radiant as a girl should upon returning from a cruise with an attractive new fiancé. She was on guard because she'd seen her ex-fiancé's sister waving on the pier. The sight of Millicent's sleek black head reminded her so poignantly of David Payson's that her heart began to ache again, and an inner voice sobbed, "David, why didn't you come? You can stop me from marrying Roger. I never meant to carry the bluff this far."

She didn't know that a more tangible obstacle than hurt pride stood in the way of a reconciliation. She hadn't heard about Lucille Lanning.

Holding up the diamond, he said lightly, "Well, ladies, that fascinating Payson lad is in circulation again. Who wants a diamond and a wounded heart? No crowding, please."

Dramatic Novelette *By Jean Johnson*

At the moment, Roger's firm fingers were on her arm, and he was saying something about news photographers. Roger was thorough. He hadn't lost any time informing the press of their engagement.

So it was that cameramen snapped smiling pictures of a slim, auburn-haired girl and a bronzed man whose pleased expression confirmed rumors that the débutante daughter of Gregory Harrison, popular novelist, was soon to be his bride. Roger Maitland was already known to reporters as a successful young lawyer who had won several spectacular cases; he was in the public eye.

Wendy's bright lips were still smiling, but her sea-green eyes darkened with apprehension when Millicent Payson rushed up and embraced her warmly. The impact of Millicent's vital personality, so like David's, reawakened a throng of memories, exciting and painful.

"Wendy, I must see you alone!" Millicent said in a breathless rush, then slanting her blue eyes at Roger, she added, "You've had her cornered for six days. Run off and look over

your briefs, handsome. We girls have much to talk about."

"I've an idea Wendy may need me for ballast." Roger's voice was clipped, unfriendly. "Your presence usually means trouble for someone."

"Have I ever bothered you—much?" Millicent asked teasingly.

His cool gray gaze took in her vividly pretty face, her impudent smile. "No," he replied. "The irrisistible Payson charm doesn't always work."

Roger was referring, Wendy knew, to Millicent's shameless attempts to beguile him in past months. But, unwittingly, he had also evoked in Wendy's mind the disturbing image of a dark young man with a maddening smile and an appealing way of looking at you that could make your heart turn over.

"Roger, I'm going with Millicent," she said quickly. She had to go; she was starved for news of David. "You can pick me up at the apartment later. There'll probably be mail from my father that will need answering." Her father was in his Maine woods hideaway, finishing an overdue book. Before she'd left for Nassau, she'd wired him about her breakup with David, whom Gregory Harrison liked, but didn't approve of as good husband material.

"Well, I suppose we had to come back to New York sometime," Roger remarked ruefully, "but I'm sorry. We've had six peaceful days. I'll telephone around five." He kissed Wendy quite masterfully.

"Ah, the forceful type!" Millicent jeered. She made a face at him and pulled Wendy toward the street where she'd parked her car.

HALF an hour later, Wendy was as sorry as Roger was that their return had brought them within range of the disrupting Payson influence, for the shock of what Millicent told her about David stunned her.

She stood in the living room of the deserted Park Avenue apartment, staring dazedly at the newspaper clippings Millicent had shown her. One gossip columnist queried:

> What dashing playboy, recently jilted, has been love-nesting with a mysterious blond beauty?

Another, bolder comment read:

> Big Brother Johnny's slick realty-development deals have saved a dwindling family fortune, but he may have trouble saving the Payson name if he doesn't hurry back from his fishing trip in Florida waters and rescue David from a siren's clutches. The name's Lucille Lanning.

Wendy's eyes were full of anguish as she looked at Millicent. "It doesn't sound like David! Is it true?"

"It's true all right," Millicent said. "What's more, he makes no attempt to deny it. He says he'll marry her whenever she sets the day. He never laid eyes on Lucille Lanning before she followed him out of the Heydey Club the night you threw his ring in his face. One of the waiters reported that a tall blonde got into the taxi with him—and that was the last anybody heard of him for three days and nights. Johnny's on a schooner, no one knows where, and I can't get hold of him. But now that you're back, I count on your being able to bring David to his senses. This woman has a strange hold on him. He isn't himself. He acts positively dopey. I'm scared!"

Wendy was frightened, too. The color had drained from her lovely oval face. If David could so soon forget what they'd meant to each other and go off the deep end over a strange woman, there was no longer any certainty in anything. He'd spent three days with Lucille Lanning.

Millicent went on, "Even if you don't care about him any more, help me save him from this adventuress. You're to blame. You humiliated him before our friends—after that, he was apt to do anything. Listen to me, Wendy! You did love David terribly not so long ago. I'll never forget the rapt way you looked at each other that

first time I brought you out to Shorehaven for the week-end. That was only a little more than a year ago. Remember?"

"Oh, he quiet!" Wendy cried unhappily, torn with remembering. While in finishing school with Millicent, she'd been fascinated by David's photograph. Meeting him later had turned a romantic dream into glorious reality. How could she forget the first night they'd danced? David, handsome and debonair, his voice vibrant in her ear, had said, "I'm afraid I'm going to fall desperately in love with you, Wendy. And when we Paysons fall, we do a good job of it. Johnny could tell you. He hasn't been the same since his one big romance went on the rocks. I'm sure ours won't."

During that whirlwind courtship, Wendy had been sure, too, that a love that could bring the stars within reach was indestructible. Then people had begun to advise her—and the starlight had dimmed a little.

They had said, "David's twenty-five and ought to be standing on his own two feet. If he's so clever, why doesn't Johnny give him an interest in his realty-development company, instead of an allowance?"

Her father had said, "You may think now that you're so madly in love with him that nothing else matters. But how can you respect him as long as he's living off his brother's bounty?"

Those were the things that had run through her mind when David had proposed to her on Treasure Island, the Paysons' strip of pine woods on the Sound. "I like to come here to make important decisions," he told her. "It's so quiet you can hear your true self speak. We love each other. Let's not waste any more time apart. Marry me now!" But though the urgency of his plea had moved her deeply, she had said that they must wait until he could adequately support a wife and they could have a nice home.

The year she'd worn his engagement ring had been stormy. They quarreled and made up. Sometimes they were very gay, often unhappy. Somehow every job David angled for slipped away from him. He didn't seem as affected by these setbacks as she was.

"Johnny's the money-making wizard of the family," he'd say blithely. "A wave of his wand turns worthless Florida land into a flourishing tourist camp, another wave transforms a bankrupt farm into a popular dude ranch. I guess I haven't the gift. I'm afraid you'll have gray in your gorgeous hair before I land a decent job!" When he talked like that, his crooked smile and the self-mocking glints in his blue eyes mixed Wendy up so that she wanted to cry over him or strike the smile from his face.

THE climax had come a week before.

Her twentieth birthday had promised to be a memorable occasion. David had been offered the assistant sales managership of the Welland Motor Corporation, and on her birthday he was scheduled to meet the president of the company and start immediately to work. Wendy was jubilant. She'd planned to announce their wedding date to their friends that evening. But David didn't telephone all day or show up at her supper party.

Finally, when her nerves were frayed to the screeching point, Roger took charge and transplanted the party to the Heydey Club. She was dancing with him, trying not to look sick with humiliation, when David made an entrance.

It was still horribly clear in her mind, the picture of David swaying in the arched doorway, his shining black hair disordered, the dark look that came with one of his unreasoning, jealous spells overcasting his fea-

tures, the corners of his flexible mouth curled.

Roger had sensed her agitation and said quietly, "Now don't let him make out that he's the injured party. You'd better give him up, Wendy, before he breaks your heart. David's unreliable —he can't keep a promise or an engagement."

When Roger led her back to their party, David was making an entertaining story of his day's adventure.

"Hello, my love," he greeted her. "Just been telling the gang how I chanced to meet some old college pals on the golf course this morning, and one thing led to another until I was best man at a wedding. See the rice in my hair?"

"Your clothes are a bit on the damp side," someone commented.

"The moisture," David laughed, "came from the shower. You see, the bridegroom got pretty tight, and I was elected one of the Knights of the Bath to help sober the poor guy up."

"May some kind friend do the same for you when your big day comes!" one of their amused friends chimed in.

But Wendy didn't laugh. She was furious. If he'd been playing golf and attending a wedding, then he hadn't kept his business appointment. His levity was a smoke screen designed to fog the issue. She'd had enough!

Her voice brittle-cold, she said. "You can be sure that if David stage-manages his own wedding, it will be a three-ring circus. But I won't be one of the performers!" And she'd torn his diamond from her finger.

"Put it back," he said, the sparkle gone from his eyes. "I know you're mad at me now, but you'll get over it."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to get over it," Roger suggested, moving closer to her.

"You stay out of this!" David blazed at Roger. "Oh, I know you've been making love to Wendy behind my back, but it won't get you anywhere. She's my girl. She'll always be mine."

His blithe assurance that she'd stand for anything because she loved him so dearly was the spark that set off her mounting anger.

"You take a lot for granted, David Payson!" she flung at him. "You'll always be a playboy at heart, a joy to your friends, a problem child to your family. Well, I want to marry an adult who faces realities."

"Now, now!" he teased, his handsome face clouding. "You sound just like one of your father's stuffy heroines."

That was when she hurled the ring, striking his cheek. For a moment his eyes blazed into hers, pain and shock in their blue depths. Then, holding up the rejected diamond, he lightly informed all within hearing, "Well, ladies, that fascinating Payson lad is in circulation again. Who wants a diamond and a wounded heart? No crowding please! One at a time!"

That was all she waited to hear. Roger left the party with her. By the time her hot tears dried, Roger had half convinced her that she wanted to join him on his Southern holiday cruise. But the chances were that she wouldn't have used her father's birthday check for passage if David had made an effort to stop her from boarding the boat the next afternoon. He hadn't telephoned or parked himself in the lobby of her apartment house —the usual procedure after one of their quarrels. She didn't hear a word from him.

In the six days of the cruise that followed, she'd tried desperately to enjoy herself. But walking with Roger under crystal-bright stars, dancing to languorous music, her heart had been heavy with longing for a reckless young man who hated to plan anything in advance. Roger wasn't like that. He had their future life carefully mapped out, a life that would be colorless, flat as stale soda water, without David. In despair she'd promised her-

self that she'd take David back if he met her at the boat.

But he hadn't come. And now she knew why.

DISTRACTED, Wendy glanced at her wrist watch. At any minute Roger would telephone. She looked helplessly at Millicent. "What do you want me to do?"

"Come out to Shorehaven for the week-end," Millicent said. "Bring Roger, of course. I want to get his reaction to Lucille Lanning."

Wendy's heart pounded. "She'll be there?"

Millicent nodded. "I telephoned and invited her myself. She was delighted —and there was nothing David could do but fume. He's bringing her out early in the evening. Dinner at eight."

"You've some mad scheme in mind, and I don't want any part of it!" Wendy declared.

Then the telephone rang. Expecting Roger's crisp, assured tones, she caught her breath at the sound of David's voice, carefully light, but not assured.

"Heard your boat got in this afternoon. Have a nice time, darling?"

For an instant the disordered world was right side up again, but the quizzical look in Millicent's eyes quieted Wendy. She said, "We must have a poor connection, David. Did you call me 'darling?' "

"Yes, I did!" he shouted. "You run off with other men, and I'm still a faithful sap in my fashion."

Wendy bit her lower lip fiercely. He was feeling his way, trying to find out how much she knew before he committed himself.

"I'd like awfully to see you," she baited him. "Want to take me to dinner?"

There was an eloquent pause. Wendy could almost see David's dark brows meet as he tried to think of an inspired alibi.

"Sorry, but I'm tied up tonight." It came flatly, uninspired. "But I'll be seeing you around, won't I? I mean there's no reason why two civilized people can't be friends after a break-up."

"I'm so glad you're going to be sensible," she said, too sweetly. "Call me again some day." She hung up, tears stinging her eyes. There was no doubt about it, he was tied up!

"Coming to Shorehaven?" Millicent wanted to know.

"Of course!" Wendy said. "I wouldn't miss this chance of seeing them together. But Roger's not going to want to go." But she wasn't deeply concerned over Roger's reluctance, not with the thought of being near David again making her blood sing. Perhaps it wasn't too late.

CHAPTER II

AT Shorehaven, where on other week-ends she had spent happy hours planning her future home with David, Wendy found it hard to believe that the events of seven days had changed the design of their lives. The garden, seen through the casement windows of her room, was the same. And there was the dearly familiar photograph of David on the dressing table.

She put on a moss-green gown with a belt of copper leaves, and brushed her hair back so that it fell in a ruddy shower to her shoulders. David used to say he liked to warm his hands in the fires of her hair.

Her own slim hands were icy, and she was rigid with suspense when she heard a car drive up, then David's rich voice demanding, "Where's Mrs. Holly, Millicent?"

Wendy herself had been surprised when the housekeeper wasn't on hand to meet her, but she hadn't asked questions for fear Roger would suspect that something was wrong. He'd been grumpy enough as it was, on the drive out.

"Mrs. Holly had a long-distance telephone call," Wendy heard Millicent explain as they came upstairs. The door was partly open, and she could hear every word. "Her sister wanted to see her," Millicent added.

"If you'd told me earlier," David said crossly, "I'd have brought Lucille out another time."

"Don't worry, David," Millicent said. "We'll have dinner at the country club. I've already made reservations."

"But I don't think that's advisable—" he began.

"I'd like to go to the country club," a soft musical voice interrupted. "We can't go on being recluses from the world, my sweet."

Unable to control her curiosity any longer, Wendy jerked her door wide open and stepped into the hall.

"Wendy!" David exclaimed in undisguised surprise.

The three of them stood stockstill as Wendy's flashing green eyes searched his shadowed blue ones, noted the sharpened contours of his face. Then she looked at the woman who was with him.

She had expected an obvious Broadway siren, but Lucille Lanning was a puzzling type. A tall woman about thirty, she was exquisitely dressed in a smart gray ensemble. Her pale-gold hair gleamed under the brim of a large velvet hat. The Parma violets on her silver fox jacket were a shade deeper than the eye shadow that gave her dark-fringed eyes an intriguing slant. Her fine-boned face was ivory-white except for the faint touch of lipstick on her thin lips.

As Millicent seemed tongue-tied, the newcomer introduced herself.

"I'm Lucille Lanning, and you, I imagine, are Wendy Harrison, the girl David thought he was in love with." She said that very gently, and turning, smiled at David, who was obviously feeling uncomfortable. "Don't be so troubled, my dear. I'm sure we'll all get on well together. Miss Harrison seems charming."

The girl he thought he was in love with! That stung Wendy to the quick. She hated this calm woman with the voice and bearing of a lady of distinction, hated her for making her feel so awkward and uncertain.

"Lucille, I'll put your bag in Johnny's room," David said hastily. "Then I'll catch a shower before dinner." And he left them, obviously glad to get away.

Too late, Wendy wished she hadn't come. It was torment to see him claimed by another woman. And he was so changed! The old defiant sparkle was gone. Was it Wendy's fault or Lucille Lanning's?

A FEW moments later, as Wendy passed David's door on her way downstairs, it suddenly opened and his arms reached out, caught her and pulled her inside.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming here?" His voice was harsh with strain.

"You didn't ask me," she said unsteadily. Straight and slim, she stood with her back against the closed door. "If you just dragged me in here to quarrel—"

"I didn't. Oh, what's the use? I'm starved for you!" He caught her in his arms, crushed her hard against him. Nothing he could have said would have been as expressive as his flaming kiss that held such desperation and ardor.

And her lips warmed, responded, clung madly.

"I've missed you terribly," he confessed, raising his head. "I thought I was seeing things when you popped out of your room." He ran his fingers through her bright hair, looked down at her as if he could never bear to look away. "You're lovely in that green dress, my darling, like a wood nymph. I was crazy to think I could hold you."

"But you are holding me," she whispered. It was so natural for them to be together again, to cling, to kiss. "You do love me, David! You still do!"

"I never stopped. I never will. I'm not a very bright boy, but I've sense enough to know you belong in my arms."

"I know," she murmured. "I shouldn't have run away. I won't again." She pressed her cheek against his and missed the bleak look in his eyes. "You're unhappy. You're tired. We fought too much over silly things. But we'll get straightened out."

"It's too late," he said dully.

She drew back then, saw his clouded face, and an agony of fear chilled her. "David, you're not serious! You don't mean to marry this woman—"

"But I do, Wendy. I've got to." There was a grim set to his jaw.

"But how can you when you love me?" she cried. "Miss Lanning looks intelligent. She'll understand."

"Oh, she'll understand why it's second nature for me to reach out and grab you if you're within reach. But she won't let me off my promise to marry her I should. I promised her."

"How did you come to make such a promise?" Wendy demanded jealously.

"I don't remember the circumstances," he admitted. "But she's got it on wax. I heard the phonograph record of my proposal. I'm sure an eloquent dope when I'm tight!"

"A woman who'd take advantage of a man's promises when he's drunk is nothing but a common adventuress!" she stormed.

"Lucille's very uncommon," he said with a tight smile. "She's got brains, and she's not hard on the eyes, either."

"Why, you don't want to give her up!" Wendy accused, and waited for him to deny it.

But he didn't. Looking thoughtful, he mused, "She's a rather wonderful woman. When you're with her, you feel she has a kind of guiding force. You believe in her rightness. If she says I owe her the protection of my name, I guess I do. I'm vague about going home with her, but I do know I woke up in her apartment with an awful headache. I remember her maid looked quite shocked when she saw me. I'm told that the doorman and the elevator man will confirm the fact that I've been her only male visitor, and that I stayed in the apartment three days. So use your imagination!"

Wendy was using it, and she felt sick. "David, you mustn't marry this scheming woman!" Her voice rose wildly. "If it's money she's after, Johnny will buy her off."

"Do you realize what you're saying? You're insulting both Lucille and me!"

She shrank from the white fury of his face. He looked as if he wanted to strike her.

"Once upon a time," he went on tensely, "I was so mad about you that I couldn't bear to let you out of my sight. I asked you to take a gambler's chance and marry me, but you put me off. You said you couldn't respect me so long as I took money from my brother. What brand of chiseler would I be if I asked Johnny to settle my account with Lucille—assuming money would settle it? No, thanks! I got myself into this jam and I'll pay the piper in my own currency. Who knows?—I may even regain my self-respect. At any rate, you've no kick coming. We're washed up. And you've got Roger, a good solid guy, pillar of society." His mouth twisted bitterly.

"After a year of your nonsense, I need a pillar to lean against," she flared.

His answer to that was to take her in his arms and kiss her, a hard kiss, in which he seemed to be trying to implant some of his own frustration and bitterness. And then, "Marry your stuffed shirt and leave me alone!" he said against her lips.

She hated him then for being able to stir such turbulent emotions in her, hold her in his arms and tell her to leave him alone. Clearly his mind was made up. He was not going to break with Lucille Lanning.

Before she was out of his arms,

there was a knock at the door; then the door opened softly and Lucille came in. She was wearing gray again; chiffon swirled about her tall shapely figure like drifting smoke.

Her pale, interesting face expressionless, she said to Wendy, "Your young man has gone downstairs. I think you'd better re-do your mouth. David is rather hard on one's lipstick." She was wiping his lips with her handkerchief, quite as though she were cleaning jam from a naughty boy's mouth.

Her cheeks burning, Wendy ran out of the room.

LATER, as she went down the stairs, Roger came over to her, looked at her anxiously. "You're trembling, dear. Did you have a run-in with David?"

"We did have a few words," she admitted. "He's—impossible."

"Of course he is," Roger agreed cheerfully. "Darling, I'm sorry I was so cross about coming out here. I didn't get the point at first. Now I think it's a good idea to show your friends that he means nothing to you now. Besides, you're getting another sample of Payson inefficiency. This family lives in a shambles when Johnny isn't around to run things. Imagine a housekeeper walking out the day week-end guests are due to arrive. Believe me, we'll do a better job of entertaining in our home."

While he talked, he produced a jeweler's box, opened it and slipped a magnificent square-cut diamond on her engagement finger. "I wanted to give you this earlier today, but we didn't have a moment alone after Millicent turned up."

A numbing cold stole over Wendy as she looked down at the blazing jewel. Until Roger's ring had actually been on her finger, their engagement had lacked reality. She'd confidently expected that at the last moment David would step in between them. Now that was all over.

"It's a beautiful ring," she murmured. "Thanks for being so patient with me, Roger. You're—swell."

She meant that. Roger was the nicest man she knew. They had many interests in common, mutual friends. They'd have a pleasant, well-ordered life.

"The blond lady I met in the upper hall looks capable of keeping David in order," Roger was saying. "She has something besides looks. I imagine she'll be a match for Millicent, too."

Puzzled by his gloating tone, Wendy glanced quickly at his nice brown face. "You're always out to knife Millicent, aren't you?"

"Oh, not exactly. But I don't like her. She's an empty-headed flirt. You can't carry on an intelligent conversation with her without having it end in an argument. You and I don't quarrel. You're honest, clear-thinking, a girl I can respect, a wife I'll be proud of."

Tears came into Wendy's eyes. She'd wanted to be proud of David, too. How long was this desire for him to be a fever in her blood, a gnawing ache in her heart?

Roger's arm was about her possessively when the others came downstairs. She did not draw away. She felt like a stone.

Millicent, bewitching in an off-the-shoulder yellow gown, was noticeably ill-at-ease in Lucille Lanning's presence. Millicent caught the flash of Wendy's new diamond, and she laughed. "Showy little piece! Did ice tongs go with it?"

"You can give them to us for a wedding present," Roger said.

"If this is to be a congratulation party, we need liquor," David mumbled. His eyes had an unhappy glitter.

"Tex Shannon's waiting for us at the club," Millicent said. "We'll have cocktails there. David's concoctions taste like medicine."

Her brother shrugged. "Seems I can't even be trusted to mix a decent drink."

"No matter," Lucille soothed him. "I prefer that sherry you always order, anyway."

The build-up method, Wendy thought. This woman flattered his ego.

THERE was crackling tension throughout dinner at the country club. Friends of David and Wendy stared curiously at Lucille. Heads bent together, whispering.

Millicent, after one cocktail too many, said insolently, "Lucille, why don't you dance with David? He's pretty good at an old-fashioned waltz."

"I'm not really old-fashioned," Lucille said serenely, "but tonight I'd rather watch David dance with Wendy." Then she smiled at Roger. "I hope you don't mind sitting out a dance with me. I've been following your interesting career. I want to talk to you about it."

Dancing with David was an ordeal for Wendy. His touch was fire to her.

His voice savage, he said, "Have you heard my bright little sister's plan for tomorrow? We're going to spend the day at Treasure Island. Won't that be just too ducky?"

"Oh, David!" She missed a step, and he caught her closer. His lips brushed her shimmering hair. Was he too remembering the pungent smell of burning pine that had drifted about them as their lips clung in sweet wild kisses the night he had asked her to marry him?

When they returned to the table, Millicent was telling Lucille about the island. "It's a wild, primitive sort of place. You'll love it. It only takes about half an hour to get there in our motorboat. We'll take a lunch basket."

"Why don't we do our camping on the golf course tomorrow?" David said uneasily.

But Lucille said softly, "I'd like to see your island." And that was that.

If, by bringing Lucille Lanning to the club, Millicent hoped to demonstrate that she was not their social equal, she didn't succeed. Lucille's manners were faultless. Both Roger Maitland and Tex Shannon—Millicent's current flame — appeared charmed by Lucille's graciousness.

And apparently Lucille wasn't a gold-digger either, for when the waiter handed David the check, and embarrassed David by requesting something on account, in place of his too well-known signature, Lucille drew a roll of bills from her evening bag and stuffed the money into David's hand.

"Take what you need, dear," she said calmly. "I know you're good for it. Anyway, it's all in the family."

Wendy felt shut out, miserable. That night she cried herself to sleep. There was a blurry smear on David's photograph where her wet cheek had pressed against it.

MILLICENT knocked on Wendy's door at seven the next morning, wanting help with breakfast and the lunch basket.

Wendy looked skeptically at the sun that shone palely through a gray mist.

"What if it does rain a little?" Millicent challenged. "We won't melt. I want to see that woman's face with the make-up washed off. I'll bet she's an antique."

"Sh!" Wendy warned as she heard the click of high heels on the stairs.

The two girls looked jaunty in bright sweaters, flaring woolen skirts and practical sports shoes. But Lucille came downstairs in the smart gray ensemble, silver foxes, and big hat.

When David appeared in old blue slacks and a sweat shirt, he glanced as Lucille's costume and frowned concernedly.

"You'll ruin that outfit, Lucille," he mumbled. "If it rains—"

"My big hat will be useful as an umbrella," Lucille said nonchalantly.

"You have a grand sense of humor," Roger praised her.

"Thanks. I like you, too," Lucille smiled.

Wendy looked at David's tense, somber face and wanted to run upstairs and lock herself in her room. He certainly didn't relish this excursion any more than she did. He didn't look as if he'd slept well, either.

When Tex Shannon failed to join them at the boathouse, David said to Millicent, "Your big moment has more brains than I credited him with. He knows that a rainy day like this calls for a book, a fireside and a bottle of Scotch. We're pust plain crazy!"

"Now, David," Lucille chided him gently, "don't be a killjoy. We'll have a fire on the island, won't we? And I brought some liquor along in case we get chilled." She indicated a package in her arms.

"What a woman!" Roger breathed.

"She thinks of everything!" Wendy reflected morosely.

CHAPTER III

THE motorboat trip across the Sound was by no means gay. David was moodily silent and kept as far away from Wendy as space would permit. From time to time, Roger looked at Millicent's pretty face speculatively, as if he distrusted the bland innocence of her expression. Wendy found herself worrying over the preservation of Lucille Lanning's expensive costume. They might, she thought guiltily, have had the decency to rig up something more suitable for her to wear!

The weak apology for a sun had completely disappeared before they were halfway to the narrow green island, and the chill wind that had sprung up sent a flurry of whitecaps scudding across the gray water.

Wendy was the first to call attention to the spiral of smoke that rose above the pine trees. "There must be somebody at the shack," she said.

David peered toward the shore. "No boat at the landing," he reported.

"Maybe some kids swam over from the mainland," Millicent said, looking worried.

"Some swim!" Roger remarked, with a backward look at the stretch of choppy water. "Only an athlete could do it in good weather."

It was raining dismally by the time they reached the boat landing.

"Swell weather for a day in the open!" David complained. "Oh, well, there's a roof on the shack."

But they soon discovered that he was optimistic. There was no shack, only some charred, smoldering ruins of walls and strips of corrugated tin that had once been a roof. Somehow it had caught fire and burned down.

Rogers laughed shortly. "You were right, David. We should have camped out at the country club."

The dispirited party returned to the landing and climbed into the motorboat. The engine gave a few choking gasps and stopped dead.

"You said you'd checked on the gas!" David fumed at his sister.

"Maybe she didn't take a very good look." Roger's voice was brittle with suspicion.

A guilty flush warmed Millicent's cheeks. "Am I accused of burning down the shack, too?"

"We'll never know!" Roger's jaw had a squared, angry set.

"Must we stand here in the pouring rain while you snarl at each other?" Lucille asked. "Of course, my hat gives me some protection, but the rest of you aren't so fortunate."

Wendy started to say, "I don't see what else we can do—" but checked herself. For suddenly, amazingly, she did see. Lucille had shown her the way. She said clearly, "If we have to stay here until they come looking for us, David will know what to do."

Questioningly, David's eyes met the shining look in her green ones. Then the brooding look left his face, and he said with an air of authority, "We

should be able to do something with that tin roofing if it's cool enough to handle."

He took the initiative from then on, and Wendy marveled at his forcefulness. He decided what strips of tin were soundest to fasten against the tree trunks until a sizable shelter was constructed. When the rain came down in torrents, they had a fire going in the partially protected outdoor hearth.

"Desert island stuff!" Roger scowled at Millicent, whose face had a crumpled look. "I suppose you'd think it was great fun if we were marooned here for a couple of days and ended up in a hospital with pneumonia!"

"Oh, shut up!" Millicent choked, her dark head lowered.

Wendy was disappointed in Roger. He was more caustic than cooperative. But David was working hard. Wendy helped him bring in pine boughs to be dried before the fire so they wouldn't have to sit on the damp ground. Close to him, taking orders from him, she was almost happy again. Though they said little, there was a closer communion of spirit between them than she'd ever experienced before.

She wasn't jealous when he spoke kindly to Lucille, apologizing for her ruined clothes. Lucille was being an awfully good sport. She'd knocked the outrageous heels off her slippers and was busily making coffee in a battered coffee pot. She seemed oblivious of her bedraggled appearance. But Lucille was such a pathetic sight with her wet hair and streaked make-up that Wendy couldn't gloat over her unmasking. When the men were collecting more firewood, she dug a compact out of her sweater pocket and offered it to Lucille.

Lucille glanced at the compact, then at Wendy's grave face. "That's a generous gesture, Wendy." Her soft voice was a trifle husky. She pushed the compact away. "I don't need it."

"I know you don't," Wendy acknowledged. "Your beauty's inside. You give David something he didn't get from me. You make him feel important."

"So did you down at the landing. But he won't let me down." Lucille's tone had hardened. "He knows I believe he'll keep his word."

THE men returned, and the contents of the lunch basket were distributed in glum silence. They were all so preoccupied that no one noticed Millicent slip away. She'd been gone over half an hour when Roger said nervously, "I'm going to find out what that crazy kid's up to now."

It was dusk when he carried her back. They were both dripping, and not from rain.

"I caught her trying to swim to the mainland for help," Roger gasped. "The little fool would have drowned!"

"What's it to you?" Millicent sobbed against his chest.

"I—don't know." Roger's gray eyes looked dazed.

"I knew about the gas," Millicent confessed, "but I didn't burn the shack."

"I know," he said gruffly. "I found some boys' camping equipment in the woods. They must have been at the shack and left a fire burning. You shouldn't pay attention to my cracks." Cradling Millicent in his arms, trying to stop her shivering, he dropped on one knee before the fire.

"I'll get her something hot to drink," Lucille offered.

Wendy looked on, dumb with amazement. The sight of Roger holding Millicent so tenderly made her wonder.

"It's not raining much now," David said. "I'm going to build a signal fire down at the point. Give me a hand, Wendy?"

She walked beside him through the windy darkness, her mind in turmoil. They did not touch each other. There was such intensity of feeling between them that a light word or a provocative movement might have caused an explosion.

When the brush fire was crackling, they stood watching the shooting flames. David's hands were clenched in his pockets.

At length he said, "When we get away from here, no more casual get-togethers! You know we can't stand —keeping apart. I'll try to get Lucille to go away with me for a while. But as this may be our last chance to talk, I want to clear up some things I wouldn't explain before. You had a right to break off with me that night I came to the Heydey Club tight. You figured I'd let you down again. But I hadn't—not altogether. I did see the president of the Welland outfit, but he wanted to see what ideas I had for a new sales campaign before he took me on. Told me to come back later. I left his office feeling too sunk to telephone you. I'd failed to make the grade so many times before that I just couldn't admit what sounded like another failure, so I followed the line of least resistance—forgot my troubles with some of my merry friends. You were a wise girl to change partners—"

"I wasn't!" she cried passionately. "I was trying to plot our romance on the success-story lines father uses in his books. And Johnny is father's ideal, go-getting hero. But if you were like your brother—hard and arrogant —I couldn't love you so much. I made my mistake when I didn't marry you a year ago. We'd have been stronger together. We could have lived happily on very little."

"That's what I hoped you'd say when I asked you to marry me." His voice was tight with emotion. "I'd been offered a job selling cars, but the salary wasn't anything to brag about. And when you held out for a position of importance, I didn't tell you about it. I don't know why. I guess I'm stubborn. I loved you, but I hated being made to feel that you were a prize I'd get if I ran a good race. And wanting you so much made me quarrel with you over trifles."

"Oh, David, I wish I'd listened to my heart instead of other people's advice. We had something precious, and we've lost it—"

"Don't cry, sweetheart—I can't stand it!" He made a move toward her, then stiffened, his attractive face stern with resolve. "I shouldn't have grabbed hold of you yesterday and started things between us again. Listen, I was putting on an act when I let you believe I'd made love to Lucille. The part about my going home with her and promising to marry her was true enough. It's too bad she smashed the record she made of my wild speech about how my girl had thrown me over and I'd marry anybody who was willing to take on a bad investment. Lucille called my bluff for some reason. We weren't love-nesting those days I spent in her apartment. She was sobering me up, helping me map out that sales campaign. Wouldn't it be ironical if I landed that high-salaried job now?"

Wendy had a glimpse of the heaven they had lost. She said bravely, "I don't understand her motives, but I feel that Lucille is a fine woman. I was furious yesterday when you stood by your bargain to her. Now I admire you for going through with it."

His eyes glowed darkly in the firelight. "You're so lovely, Wendy, all the way through. I never thought we'd come here to say good-by. Dearest—just once more." His hands reached out, and his sensitive fingers went through her bright tumbled hair.

She looked at him and knew he was tortured by the thought of another man possessing her.

"I'm not going to marry Roger," she said in a whisper. "Our engagement was a cheap show, like our coming out here for the week-end. You're right. We can't—be smart and casual. It hurts too much." Briefly his arms closed around her, and the salt of her tears was in the kiss she gave him. Then she tore herself away and ran back toward the shelter.

ROGER and Millicent were alone. Millicent's head was resting against his knee, and he was gently brushing the hair back from her forehead. She was asleep.

Wendy smiled at him. "Don't look so guilty," she said softly. "I know you can't help loving her. She's like David. Sometimes the people who aggravate you stir unexpected depths in your nature. Aren't you finding that out?" She held out his ring to him.

"Yes," he admitted. He took the ring and stared down at it. "I didn't know I loved her until I saw how small and lonely she looked out there in the water."

Loneliness was a gray shroud about Wendy as she turned away to walk through the pine woods again. Millicent's reason for calling on her to help break up David's supposed love affair with Lucille was clear to her now. Obviously, Millicent had counted on a reshuffling of the cards over the weekend. But the pairing-off process hadn't turned out according to plan. Wendy, not Lucille, was left out in the cold.

She heard the throb of an engine before she reached the fringe of the wood near the boat landing, and stopped short where she could see without being seen. Lucille was there, looking down at a tall man in a launch. He had turned a flashlight full upon her.

"Hello, Johnny," Lucille was saying. "I figured you'd turn up today. Did you get the note I left in your room at Shorehaven, telling you to come here to get us?"

"Yes," a deep voice answered. "What are you up to now, Lucy Lawrence?"

Wendy's heart raced. Lucy Lawrence! Why, that was the name of Johnny Payson's former secretary—the clever one he'd been in love with five years before! David had told her how they had quarreled over another man, and Lucy Lawrence disappeared. Lucille Lanning must be just an assumed name.

"Don't you read the papers?" the woman's soft voice was mocking Johnny Payson. "I'm the wicked adventuress who's after the Payson name, hook or crook!"

"You—an adventuress?" The man leaped out of the launch, stood beside her, caught hold of her shoulders. "It would take more than dyed hair and the fine feathers I saw in the newspaper candid camera shots to change your character. You're honest clear through, Lucy. You're grand."

"You didn't think so much of my character that day you walked into the office and found me in Stanley Blain's arms. You wouldn't believe I hadn't encouraged him, that it was all his idea, that I was telling him to leave me alone. You called me a cheap double-crosser, said the next time a girl made a fool of you she'd have more to offer than I had, such as good looks, sex appeal—"

"I was too mad to know what I was saying, Lucy. I tried to find you. I hired detectives. Where did you go?"

"To an aunt in Colorado," she told him. "She died a few months ago and left me quite a lot of money, so I came East and made myself over to fool you again. And while I was waiting for you to come back from your fishing trip, I ran into David and practiced my siren wiles on him. I thought that would get you on the scene! When I stepped in, David and his girl were throwing their love away as you threw ours away—"

"I was a hotheaded fool, darling. Give me another chance!"

"Because you need me in your business?" she teased.

"Because I've been lost without you."

Lucy laughed. "Yes, I noticed that you acted on those notes I left on the Florida tract, the Western property and several other deals. Do I get a cut out of the profits, Johnny?"

"You can write your own ticket, woman. If it will please you, Lucy, I'll advertise the fact that your cleverness was largely responsible for my first

successes. You helped me over the worst hurdles. Darling, I'll make you a partner for a wedding present!"

"When I marry David?"

"Stop tormenting me!" Johnny begged. "Haven't you had the revenge you plotted for? You fooled me. I really thought David was in a tough spot. Come back to me, Lucy. I'm practically down on my knees."

"If I marry you," Lucy went right on bargaining, "David has to get that partnership. You've given him a black eye by not taking him in with you before. Johnny, I bet you're jealous because your brother's smarter than you are! You're a big bluff, Mr. Payson—I'm a fool to love you—"

The silence that followed was most expressive. Johnny Payson was kissing Lucy Lawrence very thoroughly, and she wasn't objecting.

Wendy, observing that close embrace, swallowed hard and drew in a deep exultant breath. The miracle she'd prayed for had happened. David was free, hers again!

SHE ran down the shore to find David, wings on her feet.

He was still standing by the fire where she'd left him, a melancholy figure cast in the bronze of the firelight. Then he saw her running toward him, and the radiance in her face brought a light to his.

"What's happened, Wendy?"

"A reprieve, darling! Oh, David, it's too wonderful!" Breathless, her eyes jewel-bright, she threw her arms around him, and tears of relief and joy rained down her cheeks. "It isn't you she wants after all! Lucille wants Johnny's name. And Lucille isn't her real name. She's Lucy Lawrence! Isn't that marvelous?"

David was as pleased as Wendy when he heard about the reconciliation on the landing. "Well!" he gasped, holding her tightly. "What a dope I was not to catch on! But then I only saw her once before. She had brown hair and looked shorter, sort of mousy. Say, I won't mind having her for a sister-in-law."

"Oh, I almost forgot! You're going to have Roger for a brother-in-law, from the looks of things as I saw them a while ago."

"I can take that, too," David grinned, "now that I've got you back. What a family we'll be!"

"I'll be such a good wife, dearest," Wendy promised, deep in his arms. The rhythm of his heartbeat and hers were indistinguishable, and there was music in them and in the night wind.

"Who said there wasn't any treasure on this island?" David whispered against Wendy's sweet warm lips. "People who've been foolish enough to lose their true loves find them here. But I won't risk losing you again, dear heart. Our love is here to stay."

A Good Match

♥ ♥

He may have wealth and power and fame,
But here's the catch:
He has to set my heart aflame
If he's a good match!

—*Harriet A. Bradfield*

Jon said incredulously, "You mean you haven't told him, Iris? You mean you're just a cheap little seller of gold bricks?"

Diamonds for Heartbreak

By Dorothy Dow

Only One Man Knew the Secret of Why She Was Marrying Tracy Blake

STONE, white marble, cool and untouched; granite, aloof against the sea; rose-flushed jade, rare and exquisite and frosty—those were the things that came to

your mind when you looked at Iris Mellody. Diamonds—you thought of them, too, perhaps because her eyes were so hard, perhaps because she wore so many of them. The diamond bracelet that her fiancé had given glittered with liquid loveliness on her slim wrist in the moonlight. The enormous diamond on the third finger of her left hand boasted of the glory that only money can buy. A girl stared curiously from the shelter of the French window.

"Look at her out there alone—the best-looking woman in the whole town, and she's alone," the girl giggled. She had had a little too much champagne. "It just goes to prove what I always say—men don't like ice images, even if they do look like Helen of Troy. Men like girls with a lot of zip and pep."

"Tracy Blake likes her well enough to settle a million dollars on her the day she marries him," a young man reminded her. "And Iris has pep enough—anyway, she used to have. I can remember when she was in her first musical on Broadway—she was the zippiest girl in town four years ago."

"And the biggest paid star, and now she's going to retire and marry Tracy Blake. Some girls have all the luck! Just the same, though, she's my idea of a frozen face now if there ever was one. Look at her. Arrives half an hour after dinner last night. Goes to bed at ten-thirty. Won't play golf. Won't play bridge. Talks in a whisper—has a cold. What's she saving her voice for anyway, if she's going to retire? And what's so important about her voice? She's no opera singer—"

"She's a singer, just the same, even though it's musical comedy."

"But she's going to retire."

"That's what they all say! Tracy will have her showing off before everyone he brings to the house. Did he ever have anything he didn't show off? Listen, what about our retiring to the bar for another drink? This is a very dry house party."

Outside, on the lawn, Iris Mellody saw the figures of the girl and the man who had been discussing her move away from the light. She felt, without knowing it, that they had been talking about her. Everyone did these days—or was it just part of her imagination? Ever since her engagement to Tracy Blake had been announced, people had watched her with a new interest. Before, she had just been a singer, musical-comedy star, maybe the best, but what was that compared to being the wife of a multimillionaire?

Especially Tracy Blake's wife. Tracy Blake collected only perfect things. He had the most beautiful collection of jade in the whole world. His first wife had been the richest and most beautiful débutante of her day. His second wife had been a dancer whom many people thought the greatest the world had ever seen. His third wife would be Iris Mellody, glamour girl of Broadway; Iris Mellody, the girl with the golden hair and the golden eyes and the golden voice.

SHE uttered a sound that was like a sob being wrenched from the very depths of her heart, and then started back suddenly at the touch of a hand on her arm. Tracy Blake had come around the end of the rose hedge, his footsteps noiseless on the grass, and stood beside her, the lights from the house and the faint light of the new moon picking out the glow of the black pearls in his shirt front. She looked at him with a question in her eyes, a question and the sharp uneasiness that Tracy's presence always awakened in her.

He was tall, meticulously groomed, fifty to her twenty-two, suave, arrogant. He said, with an unmistakable undercurrent of irritation in his voice, "My dear Iris, I've been looking everywhere for you. There's someone to see you, a Dr. Brewster. He

said he was an old friend of yours and was driving past here and had seen in the papers that I was giving this party for you, so he took the liberty of dropping in. Very curious idea, calling on an old friend in the middle of a house party to which you weren't invited. Do you know him? Some crank perhaps. If it's anything you want me to handle—"

"Oh, no." For a moment she had felt so faint that she thought she would not be able to speak. Her throat had contracted; she was rigid. Fear and that other queer feeling which was such a strange blending of anger and excitement, and more, too, that came to her when she thought of Jon Brewster, flooded her whole being. He had no right—oh, he had no right!

Tracy was saying, "It will be no trouble to get rid of him. I'll tell the fellow you've gone some place else—or tell him you don't want to see him—"

"But, my dear, I do want to see him." She made it sound light and matter-of-fact, even though there was a rush of breathlessness about her husky whisper. "Of course I want to see him. He's an old friend. My father—I mean—"

"He is," Tracy Blake said, "a little young to have been a friend of your father's, it seems to me."

"My father and his father, I meant—they were great friends long ago. I want to be nice to him—" It was strange how one lie led to another lie. Everything she would say about Jon Brewster for the rest of her life would be a lie, everything but one thing.

"By all means. Would you like me to meet him?"

"Oh, no—no. I mean—later, Tracy. It's very dull, meeting old friends. I'll want to ask him so many stupid questions about people—you know—"

"Certainly, my dear." If there was just enough suspicion in his tones to remind her that Tracy Blake was notoriously the most possessive and jealous man in the world, that did not yet frighten her seriously. After marriage, it would, but not now, when she still belonged to herself. Head tilted, Iris smiled up at him, the serene smile of a child.

"Where is he—in the library? I'll—"

"Yes. But I can tell Masterson to ask him to step out here, if you prefer it. You'll have more privacy—and you might bring him in later for a drink. He seems quite presentable. I caught a glimpse of him."

"He is—presentable." She hoped he hadn't caught the sudden stiffness in her tone. It was silly of her to resent Tracy's sounding snobbish about Jon Brewster. It was silly of her to care whether anyone thought he was presentable or not. Presentable—was that the right word for stormy blue eyes and thick dark hair and a mouth that was almost unendurably beautiful to remember, a stubborn chin and an arrogant carriage that made taller men seem somehow small?

"I'll send him out here to you," Tracy said. "Don't let yourself be bored, my sweet."

"I never do."

She shut her eyes for a few moments, and when she opened them again, it was Jon Brewster who stood before her in the fragile light—Dr. Jon Brewster, twenty-seven, just starting out, small-town young man, probably going places, but it would take a long time. He wasn't especially handsome, except for his mouth; he wasn't rich; he wasn't important; why was it that in a whole world full of men only this one could start the mad surge of music singing in her heart, beautiful music, dangerous and haunting music?

She said, her husky whisper as icy as a star, "You have no right to do this. You promised. We agreed not to see each other again. Why couldn't you keep that promise? Why—"

"Do you think I wanted to come?"

The words snapped at her cruelly. Was it the moonlight that made his

face whiter than she had ever seen it, except once, or was it her imagination?

She said, "I know that you are here—here of all the places in the world where I would rather have you not be—"

"I came because I had to come. I came because you are in danger."

"Danger? Jon, what—"

It was strange to be standing this way, so close to him, and yet not touching him. It was strange to remember how it felt to be in his arms, to have his mouth crushing her own.

"The worst sort of danger," he said.

"What do you mean?" She tried to laugh when she said it. "Have you gotten melodramatic, Jon? You mean that someone has told the newspapers? You mean—"

"I mean something far worse than that." There was an urgency in his voice that made her breathless. He said gravely, "The man whose child died as a result of the accident broke out of the sanitarium last night. He has declared that he will kill both you and me on sight. We've had people looking for him ever since the alarm was given, but there's no trace. I came to warn you. I think he knows you're Iris Mellody."

"Oh, Jon! Oh!"

HE put out a hand that was suddenly unsteady and caught at his arm to keep herself from swaying. The lovely moonlit garden, the tall white house, vanished from before her eyes. Instead she saw two cars smashed on a lonely road and a gibbering man who stood about the body of a quiet child, muttering mad things, and herself crying out, "He's not dead—it wasn't my fault! He's not dead—he mustn't die!" And then, later, the hospital, white and grim, with herself holding onto the arm of a young man in a white coat. Dr. Brewster, someone said the young man was. "I did everything I could," she could still hear him say. "It was plainly the father's fault. He's well known around here, an eccentric. They're looking after him. We did everything we could, but the child died. Now we'll look at your bruises. Here—wait—"

She had come back from a long way off to find herself in a hospital bed, a nurse beside her. Dr. Brewster had come and gone, other doctors had come and gone.

Remembering, she wanted to scream, but she knew that if she tried, no sound would come. "Loss of voice from shock," the doctors had said. "Nothing to be done about it. Psychiatric treatment, maybe. She can whisper—that's something."

They hadn't known her name; she had been too ill to give it for a long time; and then somehow she realized that she was being called by another name, Miss Smith. It was funny to be called Miss Smith when you were really Iris Mellody. She had whispered a question about that, huskily, to young Dr. Brewster, and he had explained. "I recognized you—I've heard you sing. I thought it would be bad publicity for you if it got out, and so I covered for you. This is a small town; everyone knows everyone else. The sheriff is a friend of mine—it's all right with him. The accident wasn't your fault; no one blames you."

"You're terribly good to me."

"That's not hard to be."

"How—how soon will I sing again?"

"Maybe never." She remembered his voice when he said that; she would recall it to her last day on earth. It was like a death sentence, terrible, grave, regretful. She couldn't remember exactly what had happened next, only that she had cried in his arms, and that it had seemed natural to be there.

During the days that followed, the moments when he had come to talk to her had been the only bearable moments in her world. They had been

strange days of facing a life without singing, days of facing a new life, unreal days of knowing that something terrible had happened to her, and something lovely was happening to her, too.

With the memory of his kisses on her lips, she had run away, back to the safety of the life she knew—Broadway, the apartment on Fifty-second Street, Tracy waiting for her to say she would marry him.

She pulled herself back to the present with an effort. This was now; this was Tracy Blake's garden.

She whispered, utterly at a loss, "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

"That's easy, nothing to fuss about. You just have to be guarded until they get the fellow, that's all. He's really dangerous, but sooner or later they'll catch him. Until then—"

"But I can't have guards!"

"But it's perfectly simple," Jon said impatiently.

"I tell you I can't. He'd know—"

"You mean Blake?"

"Yes. Of course."

"My dear girl, what difference does it make?" There was a tinge of scorn in his voice. "Rich men understand such things. Just let me explain—"

"No! No!"

"But why not?" He was more than impatient now; he was subtly the professional man, not going to put up with nonsense. "Iris, this is dangerous. You don't seem to realize—"

"Not half as dangerous as letting Tracy Blake know—not for me, I mean."

"Know? But I don't understand!"

SHE cried, impatient in her turn, her voice thick with tension, a thick whisper in the darkness, "About any of it! He'd have to know all, if he knew any of it. The accident—I can't have him know—"

"Iris, listen." His hand was on her wrist firmly; he was staring down into her face. Even in the half dark, there was a hypnosis about that stare, as if the cure for all evils lay in it. "You're hysterical; you're not using your head. Probably I frightened you. Listen to me. There's no reason in the world why you shouldn't tell Tracy Blake that six weeks ago you were, perfectly innocently, concerned in an automobile accident in which a child was killed. And that child's father is dangerously insane. And—"

"No. I'd never dare. I—"

"Why, Iris?"

"He'd find out about my voice. He'd know everything. You don't know him, Jon. He's—very strong, very suspicious, very possessive. He has to get at the bottom of everything. He'd do it—he has money. Why didn't I tell him before? Why wasn't the father properly locked up? Why? Why? Why did I tell him I was taking a rest all those weeks, and this huskiness was just a cold? Why, why, why?"

Jon said incredulously, "You mean you haven't told him about your voice, Iris? You mean that you're just a cheap little seller of gold bricks?"

The words were intolerable. It took more than a moment for her to get her breath, to reply. Her voice was ice-cold.

"It's my business. I can't tell him. He wouldn't marry me if I did. I'm nothing without my voice, just a pretty girl in a world of pretty girls. My voice is all I have to offer, all people care about. I fought my way up to the top, Jon. Don't forget that. I know what it's like down below; I want to stay on top. He can keep me there. His money will get me my voice back—it will have to. He has all the money in the world—it will buy anything."

There was agony in her voice that rang out real and true, startling and tortured.

Jon Brewster said, almost diffidently, "He'll have to know sooner or later. You know he'll have to know—"

"After we're married—it won't matter. And we're being married soon enough for him not to get sus-

picious if this huskiness of mine doesn't clear up before then." She hated her own voice saying the words, and yet they were true. "He's so proud —he won't let anyone know because he's so proud!"

In the vague light, she could see him looking at her; almost involuntarily she turned her eyes away from the condemnation in his.

"A nice future you're planning," he said impersonally.

She cried fiercely, "It's mine! Mine!"

He was close to her; both hands had closed on her shoulders. It seemed to her that Jon Brewster had the strongest hands in the world, surgeon's hands, strong and gentle at the same time.

"You realize that you're risking your life, do you, Iris, for something not worth having or for something you can never have? I don't know which it is. Your life—against a tawdry dream! I won't let you! You can't do it—I won't let you!"

He had raised his voice in his repressed violence just loud enough to be heard a little distance away. Neither of them had seen the figure cross the lawn from the house. The first thing they knew of it Tracy was beside them, speaking easily, impersonally, dangerously.

"Just what won't you let Iris do, Dr. Brewster? You'll excuse me for eavesdropping, but after all, I couldn't help it. You weren't exactly whispering just now."

"I—Iris—I—"

"He's crazy." Iris whispered it thickly, frantically. "He thinks he's in love with me." The words came painfully. "He was saying he—he—he couldn't let me—marry you. I tried to stop him, but I couldn't. I—send him away, Tracy, send him away."

"Are you going, Brewster, or shall I have you thrown out?"

Tracy's words were crisp, the words of a superior to an inferior. For one moment Iris felt Jon go rigid. For one moment she felt, rather than saw, him turn in her direction. Tears blurred her eyes, and she looked away. It was as if he were waiting, giving her one more chance. And then, after a moment's pause, he started away across the terrace.

Tracy said lightly, "Of all the idiotic—"

"Please, Tracy." She had to be alone; it was more necessary to her than anything else in the world had ever been. "I'm upset. I didn't expect —I mean—Tracy, will you leave me alone here for just a minute so I can pull myself together? I'll join you in the library—in five minutes—"

"Certainly, my dear. You might" —his voice held certain meanings that only a very dull woman would miss—"tell me some details about the amorous Dr. Brewster. I'm interested. You've never happened to mention him before."

He went through the French doors, his figure impressive. Jon's figure, farther away, danced before her eyes. He was going down the walk fast, away from her forever, with contempt in his heart.

And then her hand went to her heart in a gesture of amazement and fear. There were two figures, not one, Jon and a shadow that crept out of the shrubbery, a shadow with an arm raised, as if about to strike.

Her breath stopped. It was as if for a moment time itself stood still. In another second that figure would plunge, that hand would fall, that knife would strike—in another second—

There was nothing else she could do! Frozen, she stood voiceless, helpless!

No, she wasn't voiceless at all! Harshly, screamingly, piercingly, madly, sounds were coming from her mouth. That was herself yelling, she, Iris Mellody, who was never to breathe a word above a whisper again!

"Jon, look out! Help! Jon! Help, help, help, help, help!"

HE came back from a long distance, from the timelessness of unconsciousness. It seemed to her, confusedly, that there were a great many people around, and that someone was singing. It was crazy, of course, but the song that was being sung was from her last show, "It's Love." She could hear the notes rise in the air, clear and sweet and true.

And then, when her head was clearer, the song had stopped. She remembered suddenly. She cried out sharply, "Jon—Jon—where are you?" and opened her eyes. The room was empty except for two men who stood looking down at her, Jon and Tracy.

Jon's left hand was bandaged; his face was cut across one cheek, not deeply. Iris sighed and stirred.

"You're all right, my dear?" That was Tracy. "You're all right now? Don't try to get up yet. Don't try to talk. We'll tell you all about it. Some crazy man was chasing Dr. Brewster, apparently. He followed the doctor's car out to my place, waited for him in the shadows until he was leaving. Thanks to your warning, the doctor was able to knock him out; the fellow's back in the sanitarium now. It's a good thing you saw him, a good thing you could yell—"

"Yell?"

"I never heard such a noise in my life. You had everyone out in a minute."

She stared at Tracy, only half hearing. It was funny to think that she had yelled. How could you yell when you could never talk above a whisper again? It must be someone else who had yelled, someone else who had saved Jon's life!

The sudden thought that but for the length of one moment in time, Jon might well be dead, went through her like a knife. She looked at him, and he looked back, waiting. She knew what he was waiting for. Her voice was caught in her throat, and she looked around the room to get courage to speak. Rare rugs and pieces of furniture so fine as to belong in a museum, tapestry worth a fortune, jade and crystal and silver —they were all hers, if she wanted them. Jon hadn't told Tracy about her voice. Jon hadn't let her down.

She said shakily, tugging at the big diamond on her left hand, "Tracy, I've got to tell you something. You'll hate me, and I don't blame you. I deserve to have you hate me. I—was going to use you, Tracy, to get my voice back, to be safe. I was frightened of being alive, I think, as much as anything. But I'm not frightened any more, Tracy. I'm going to tell you the truth. I lost my voice—weeks ago when I told you I was resting. That's why I've had this cold. It isn't a cold; I can never speak above a whisper again. I can never sing again. I'm sorry, Tracy—I'm just a phony —but I'm not phony enough to marry you."

"But you were singing five minutes ago!"

"Iris—don't you know?"

Both men were staring at her, differently, Jon with some light behind his eyes that seemed to blind her, Tracy with steel in his eyes. It was Jon who spoke.

"Iris, you had a shock just now. You fainted after you screamed. Voices are lost through shock and return through shock—every doctor knows that. No one can do anything about it. When you came back to consciousness you were singing. I thought you did it because you had realized you could. It was automatic, I guess, because it was so important to you. You were singing, Iris. You'll sing for the rest of your life—"

She felt tears running down her cheeks, tears of happiness that she could not blink back.

She pressed the ring into Tracy's fingers that did not want to close on it. He was arguing with her. He was hurt, angry, violent.

"Tracy, I'm sorry. I can't do anything about it. I'm ashamed of myself. What else can I say? Tracy—don't hate me."

"But what difference does it make?" he was saying over and over. "You can sing—why can't you marry me anyway?"

"Because I don't want to marry you, Tracy. I don't want to be rich and sheltered and looked after. I want to work. I want to sing for my living. And I probably won't marry anyone ever, unless I find some young doctor who isn't very fussy."

She went on weakly, "One asked me to marry him a few weeks ago. I didn't think he could help me get my voice back. I thought my voice mattered most. I knew—tonight—that he mattered always more than anything else in the world. So—I think I'll just sing—and wait—"

"This young doctor is very fussy," Jon said, low. "That's why he's going to marry you—without any waiting."

His arms were around her, as they had been in the blackest days when she had faced a voiceless future. His mouth was on hers, as it had been in the lovely moment before she had grown panicky and run to safety and Tracy. His kiss was ecstasy.

"And if you don't mind shutting the door," Jon said to Tracy Blake, "I'd like to show my girl what it's like to be really kissed. We're sort of behind on our kissing."

Tracy Blake shut the door. Almost, you might say, he slammed it.

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The Lady's Reputation

By
Donna Crouse

"You're not going until you've listened to me! I don't blame you for thinking what you do," he said. "The note looks bad."

POLLY was a dear to give her the use of her apartment. Gincie lit the little Chinese lamp and was charmed by what its glow did to the walnut furnishings. It was an adorable place. She drew a quivering little sigh of envy. It must be wonderful to have an apartment all one's own, so much room to move around in, to entertain friends.

She took a luxurious shower, as gentle as rain, and was patting on Polly's geranium talc when the bell rang. "Who in the world can that be?" she said out loud. "Oh, I'm not going to answer it."

Gincie went on patting talc. And then she stiffened. There was a clicking sound at the front door. Polly! It must be Polly back.

"Polly, is that you?" She pulled the shower curtain with the white sea gulls on it around her. There was a long silence. "Who's there?"

"Who's there?" It was a man's voice that mimicked her.

"What do you want?" Gincie's voice was frightened.

The man stepped closer. "Polly didn't tell me a girl went with the shower."

"Don't you come in here!" She almost screamed it.

"I said that Polly didn't tell me that

If She Wanted to Stay Out of Love, He Was the Wrong Man to Have Around

a girl went with the shower," he repeated, in a voice that was still pleasant and unruffled.

"I don't know what you're talking about." For some reason it was difficult to sound enraged. She wasn't frightened any longer. A man who sounded as nice as that couldn't be dangerous.

There weren't any more steps. "You don't have to worry. I don't like my women wrapped up in sea gulls."

"How do you know they're sea gulls?"

He gave a short laugh. "I'll wait for you in the other room, Miss Whoever-you-are."

In a flash Gincie was in her housecoat. Just in case he was as good looking as he sounded, she took special pains with her lipstick. One thing, he seemed to be well acquainted with Polly.

He was sitting very much at home in the chair by the Chinese lamp, and looked everything his voice had promised. He would have been handsome if it hadn't been for the almost comical misbehavior of his hair.

He stood as she entered and his gray eyes held a twinkle. "Well, now that I've seen you, I can't say I mind your going with the apartment in the least."

"I don't go with the apartment," she answered frigidly. "Polly Chester has given me the use of it while she's on a cruise. Now you might tell me what you're doing here."

He was fumbling in his pocket and grinning crookedly. "See this little key? Well, it's the same little key that Polly Chester gave to me before she started on that trip of hers. Said I was welcome here for the next three weeks."

Gincie could only look at him. How could Polly do a thing like this? She gave an hysterical laugh. If this was her idea of a joke, it wasn't funny. It was a perfectly horrid trick to play on anyone. It was—

Her expression changed suddenly: her brow crinkled. "Are you—are you by any chance Vern Dawson?"

The corners of his lips quirked. "Yep, that's me." He took a step nearer. "So you expected me?"

She eyed him furiously. "I didn't expect you. I— Polly gave me a letter addressed to you. Said you would call for it. Here—" She reached for it on the mantle.

He opened it solemnly and scanned it with a poker face. When he had finished, he crumpled it and put it in his pocket. He was grinning again. "Same old Polly. Has to have her little fun." His smile faded. "Now, little lady, what do you say we straighten this out? I may as well tell you, I think I have first call to this apartment. Would you mind—would you mind—"

Her lip curled. "Would I mind leaving? Yes, I would mind leaving. In fact, I have no intention of it whatsoever. How about your going, Mr.—Mr. Dawson?"

He slumped back into the chair and looked instantly comfortable. "Polly lent me this apartment. And here I stay."

She fumed becomingly and helplessly. "But you can't stay because I'm going to stay. I'm going to stay, do you hear?"

He shrugged impressive shoulders. "Well, we'll both stay. There's room enough. Probably Polly's idea at that. When you come to think of it, it isn't such a bad one. Not bad at all, in fact. Hmmm—the more I think of it, the better I like it."

"Don't be ridiculous." Gincie drew her housecoat tighter with all the dignity that she could muster. "Polly let me have this apartment so I could practice my music. She—"

"She let me come here so that I could write my plays without any interruptions." His eyebrow lifted. "At least she said without any interruptions. But who knows — maybe they'd sell better if I did them to music."

"Well, I certainly can't play the pi-

ano to a typewriter," she tossed viciously.

"Did you ever try it? You know, Gincie, sometimes—"

"How did you know my name was Gincie?"

"I can tell by looking at you that your name is Gincie. I can always tell by people's noses what their names are."

"Don't be absurd."

He crossed his legs. "All right, supposing we get down to brass tacks. One of us has got to go. I elect the lady. We'll do it by a simple process of elimination. I stay; you go."

"I'm not going I told you."

His smile was completely relaxed. "Well, then we both stay. It will be a purely platonic arrangement, of course. You stay in your half of the apartment, I'll stay in mine. But I'm afraid we'll both have to use the same kitchen."

"You're not funny."

"I don't have to be to write. My plays are tragedies."

She made for the bedroom. He was impossible.

"Again we use the process of elimination," he called after her. "I get the studio couch evidently."

GINCIE slammed the door. It didn't make half the noise she wanted it to make. "I'm mad," she told herself. "I'm good and mad." But she wasn't mad. It was just that her heart was thumping. Nervy as he was, he was likable. You couldn't get away from it. And he had wonderful teeth. She liked his eyes, too— She gave herself a mental pinch. She should be furious at Polly.

But for a girl who should have been furious, she was very careful about dressing. She made a special hole in her black leather belt so that her waist would look smaller. She opened the bottle of perfume that she had meant to keep intact until the day she married Dennis Filmore. Dennis— For the first time in ages Dennis had been farthest from her thoughts. Dennis wouldn't like this situation. Supposing he came back unexpectedly and found her here. Supposing—

She stopped supposing abruptly because Vern was calling her. She didn't answer until he began playing chopsticks on the piano. That tune had always annoyed her. "Will you be quiet?"

He played with more gusto.

She flung open the door. "Be quiet, I said."

He stopped with a bang. "Boy, you're beautiful! Even your feet are beautiful."

She flushed. She had still to put on her shoes. "We've got to do something about this," she said coldly.

He was by her in a flash. "You bet we have." His arms went around her. "You know, I've never kissed a girl who plays the piano."

"And you aren't going to." She pulled away from him furiously. "Don't you dare kiss me. Don't—"

He did dare. "I like your mouth, Gincie. I like the way you kiss. I like your perfume, too."

"Let me go—"

He grinned maliciously. "Polly said I could have everything in the apartment. Maybe she told you that, too."

She bit her lip. "Well, one thing, I most certainly don't want you."

"That'll come later. I grow on people. All right—go back and put on your shoes. I'm writing the part with the hero making love to the girl."

She had a hard time getting into her shoes. She always did when she had stood for a while in stocking feet. Her lips still had a tingling feeling, a pleasant feeling that maddened her. Imagine getting a kick out of his kissing her— One of those smart fellows. She compared him deliberately to Dennis. Dennis was so sweet and reserved, always the gentleman. She was ashamed.

What did one do in a case like this? Well, she certainly wasn't going to walk out and give him the apartment. Obviously, that was what he was trying to get her to do.

Gincie sat tapping her toes for what seemed an eternity—until she smelled bacon. She looked at her watch. It was nine o'clock.

"Want a sandwich?" he chanted outside. "You looked very hungry."

Gincie came out of the bedroom.

"If I didn't like bacon better than anything else, I wouldn't come out," she told him stiffly.

"I knew you liked bacon. I can always tell by people's ears when they like bacon."

She laughed in spite of herself. "You're just — you're just — crazy."

He smiled. "Most people who are crazy got bumped on the head when they were babies. I didn't. I got bumped in the heart—tonight, Gincie."

He really looked serious. All the foolishness had gone out of his eyes. "I think I'm falling in love with a girl who's eating bacon. Would she mind?"

"Eating more bacon?" flipped Gincie. But to herself she added, "Be sensible, Gincie. He's still having fun."

"But I mean it, Gincie." He got up and came over to her. "Do you think a girl who plays the piano could ever get to like a fellow who writes plays and sells them sometimes? Do you think so, Gincie?"

Gincie's heart was beating fast.

"But you just met me tonight. You —you don't fall in love with people just like that. You—" She stopped. If only he wouldn't grin again!

He didn't grin. "I'm a funny guy, Gincie. When anything gets me, it hits me right between the eyes. It's always been like that with me. Always—"

"You're not a funny guy." She felt strange, bewildered. She'd never felt like this before. She mustn't feel like this. "Vern, I'm—I'm engaged to someone."

"Oh." He was still for a moment. And then he was pulling her to her feet. "What difference does it make if you are engaged, Gincie? It isn't like being married, is it? You still have time to change your mind. What's an engagement?"

"Please don't say any more. Please, Vern—" She broke away from him and fled into the bedroom. Nice men didn't ask girls to break engagements just like that. Nice men didn't make love to girls they had just met, and make them feel the way she did.

Two wretched hours later she was dressed in her housecoat again and ready for bed. Her door was locked, and now there was no light under the crack. Funny that he had made no attempt to banter again, to apologize. Everything was funny—but with it there went something that was much like hurt.

She tried to sleep. The hours dragged tortuously. Why did she worry about a man who meant nothing to her? For the first time she felt really peeved at Polly's idea of a prank. It was a horrid thing to do.

Suddenly she remembered the note. Perhaps there was something in it that would tell her how to deal with this Vern Dawson.

But did she dare? Never in her life had she looked at anything that wasn't meant for her eyes.

She tiptoed to the living-room door. She could hear his regular breathing, and the coat was still lying on the piano seat where he had put it. It took but a moment to get the note out of the pocket.

Back in her room, she unfolded it with trembling fingers and held it under the lamp. Gincie read:

Dear Vern:

Her name is Gincie. She's the girl I told you about. Just your type I think. I'm asking you one favor, fella. Stick around if she'll let you, and play up to her a bit. I've lent her my apartment and my piano. I'm taking the man she was going to marry along on the cruise. Sort of make up for it, will you? Sure, I'm a heel.

POLLY

Polly and Dennis! Gincie coupled them dully. But it wasn't that thought that stabbed her the most. "Play up to

her a bit. Sort of make up for it, will you?" That was what hurt.

Only playing up to her—only playing up to her! The words churned sickishly in her head. That was the reason for his banter, his love-making—his kiss. No wonder he had said so lightly, "What's an engagement?" And the heart-rending part of it was that it mattered—terribly.

She had to get out of here! She had to get a million miles away.

As quietly as she could, she packed her bag and dressed. Finally she was ready, and turning off the light, she tiptoed down the hall.

She was almost at the door when she heard him move on the couch, heard the springs creak a little. In a panic she grabbed at the doorknob.

"Gincie!"

The lights switched on, and his eyes were penetrating hers. "Running out on me, are you, Gincie? Why?" He asked it gently. He was still dressed in his shirt and trousers, his collar open at the neck. "Answer me, Gincie. Why are you running out on me?"

"I'm going," she said, "that's all."

He came closer. "Is it—is it because of how I acted? It is because of how I acted. I know it is." He reached for her. "I'm sorry. I acted like a fool, Gincie. Please believe me when I say I'm sorry. I wouldn't have said it if I hadn't meant it. I—"

"You didn't mean it." Her mouth set coldly. "Please don't pretend that you did. It really doesn't matter that much."

"No, don't go. I've got to talk to you." His face was passionately earnest. "I swear I meant what I said to you, every word of it. I am in love with you, Gincie."

HER eyes didn't soften. "I may as well tell you. I read that note of Polly's. I took it out of your pocket a little while ago. So you see, I know what you've been trying to do. And you've done it very well. In fact, you had me—believing you." Her voice broke a little. And at that moment her heart was in her eyes.

"Vern, I'm—I'm really going."

He took her almost roughly in his arms. "You're not going until you've listened to me. I don't blame you for thinking what you do, Gincie. The note looks bad. I admit it. And I can't excuse it or tell you that I didn't do what Polly asked me to do. I did start off that way. I meant to do her a favor because she's done a lot for me."

He pulled her closer. "There's only one thing I didn't expect—to find that I didn't have to play. All the time I was teasing you, I was falling in love with you, Gincie. And I was glad—glad even though you'll probably hate me for it—that Polly took away that fellow who belonged to you."

There was no mistaking now that he was telling her the truth. It was in his eyes, his lips, in his fingers clutching her.

"I'm glad you're glad," she said.

"You mean you—" His eyes probed hers.

"I mean I—"

He caught her to him. "Oh, my darling—I love you so."

As he held her close, she was thinking of how impractical they were—the girl who played the piano and the boy who wrote plays. But they'd get along. She was even more sure as he kissed her. There would always be fun. There would always be love.

A love story you musn't miss . . .

Misleading Lady

by ELAINE HEYWARD

In the January issue . . . on sale November 22nd

LOVE FICTION MONTHLY

There Goes My Heart!

By Helen Burns

She Thought She Knew How to Handle Any Man in Hollywood

"FOR Pete's sake, youngster, I'm not making a pass at you," Jim Shane snapped. His eyes that were so startlingly blue in his hard brown face jutted fury. "A dumb kid like you has no place in this racket you're in. I'm just offering you a chance to quit it and tackle a decent job."

A hot flush of embarrassment streaked up across Patty McLean's face to the roots of her long reddish hair, but her slim figure in the too gay green dress remained rigidly defiant. Jim Shane's anger wasn't going to startle her from her conviction that his offer of a job wasn't on the level.

Jim Shane had been nice, nicer than any of the other Hollywood directors she had called on. Then, out of a clear sky he had offered her a chance in pictures. Of course, she was skeptical about it. Men, she told herself vigorously, didn't do those things for nothing.

She bristled now. "As long as there are saps like you to throw money away, I'll make more than enough taking orders for champagne around the studios. I've built up a high-class clientele."

Jim ran exasperated fingers through his thick black hair. "Yes, and you ought to hear the wisecracks your high-class clients make about the little redhead who peddles the giggle water," he barked. "I'm telling you, an inexperienced youngster like you has no business in that racket."

Dumb! Inexperienced! Patty was furious. Raised by a father who was a race track tout, Patty knew she lacked education, the acquired cul-

ture of the smooth, throaty-voiced girls who cluttered up the Hollywood studios.

Her full, sweet mouth curled scornfully. Her exciting amber eyes blazed. "I may be only eighteen, but I know my way around," she insisted fiercely.

Knowing her way around meant one thing to Patty—it meant suspecting every man who tried to be friendly. She said now, "And I'm smart enough to know you're not offering me a feature rôle in your series of shorts because you think I'm star material."

"You bet I'm not!" Jim agreed vehemently. "It's just that—well, it gets me to sit by and watch an infant like you walk wide-eyed into trouble. It so happens that your flaming hair and tiger eyes are naturals for technicolor. With training, you can walk effectively through the shorts I'm doing on sporting events. You don't have to act."

She wasn't going to let that deep, magnetic voice get her down. "Except act nice to you," she flung at him.

Jim shook his dark head. "Swell guys you must have met up with," he muttered.

As she watched him, trying to figure him out, Patty's eyes darkened. With his jutting jaw, his long, powerful figure, Jim Shane looked as hard as nails. But his blue eyes, that were as quick to laughter as they were to anger, were honest eyes.

Abruptly the set of his wide, sensitive mouth relaxed. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, Patty," he said. "And as for the other men, you can't blame them too much when you go around fluttering those long eyelashes to get orders for champagne."

He went on earnestly, "It's true that if you signed up as a stock player, you wouldn't make any more money than you're making now. But if you're willing to work—and from what you've told me about yourself I judge you are—you'd have advantages beyond anything any expensive girls' school could give you. Our coaches would teach you how to walk and dress and talk, how to enjoy music and art and books—a lot of things you've been missing. Wouldn't you like that?"

She would like it—terribly. And she looked away from him because, with his eyes compelling hers, she was afraid she'd be tempted to trust him too much.

Through the wide windows of Jim's office, she looked out upon the enticing world his offer would open to her.

The jacaranda trees were a blue froth along the road that led past the huge sound stages to the bungalows of the stars. Green terraces, spotted with clusters of blood-red poinsettia, swept down to a tiled swimming pool.

As Patty watched, a pair of Spanish dancers hurried through the door of the nearest sound stage. Below the window two streamlined girls sat under a lawn umbrella intent on studying a script. Farther on, a physical instructor was putting bronzed young men through a drill.

It was a magic world, but an earnest, working world, too—far more desirable to underprivileged Patty McLean than the gay and hectic life out-of-towners always expected of Hollywood.

When once again her eyes sought Jim's, she was a little less wary than she had been before.

"I'd like nothing better than to work here and learn things," she told him earnestly, "if—you'll sign a contract with me."

His eyebrows went up. "A contract with you?" Jim repeated, puzzled. "And what could that be?"

Patty's hands gripped the edge of her chair. She flushed, but went on stubbornly. "That—that you won't try to—to date me while I'm under contract to you."

Jim threw back his head and laughed, his teeth flashing very white

in his brown face. "That's a new one," he chuckled. "But we'll write it up and sign it right now when you sign up as a stock player."

He pulled a contract from his desk, on a blank sheet of paper wrote out a three-line contract in a bold forward scrawl, and shoved it across the desk to Patty.

Her cheeks burned as she read:

I, Jim Shane, agree not to ask Patty McLean for a date—even for lunch—for the duration of her contract with Four Star.

JIM SHANE

"Okay?" Jim asked, amused.

"Okay," she answered weakly.

He handed her a pen. Holding it stiffly, she signed her name.

JIM pulled himself to his feet and came around the desk to her. "On second thought that contract isn't as funny as it seems," he said gently.

He laid a friendly hand on her shoulder. But as he felt her stiffen, he jerked his hand back.

"Poor little kid," he said gravely. "You're like a stray kitten that bites and scratches when you try to pet it—because it's afraid it'll be kicked."

Looking up at him Patty's eyes grew troubled, but her mouth still held defiance.

After a moment, Jim said, "I think I'll tell you something, Patty, that will set your mind at rest—about me. Can you keep a secret?"

She nodded. She held her breath, waiting for what was coming.

"Well, then, you can be sure I'm not interested in you as a girl at all—for the very good reason that I'm engaged to Denise Williams, my very lovely secretary. For reasons of our own, we prefer not to let it be known around the studio."

Patty's head went down. Quick tears of humiliation came into her eyes. She wished the floor would open and swallow her.

Jim Shane had only been kind to her! He felt sorry for her!

What a fool he must think her!

She got up. Without looking at him, she said shakily, "Thank you—for telling me." Then she turned and started for the door.

As she opened it, Jim said, "Report to the dramatic coach at nine in the morning. And good luck to you, Patty."

She hurried past Denise Williams' desk, out into the corridor.

Jim Shane was engaged to that dark, sultry girl who was as lovely as any movie star. The thought of Denise Williams was like a physical blow to Patty.

And Patty knew why! All of a sudden she knew why! Jim Shane, the first man who had ever been kind to her, was wonderful! She worshiped him. She loved him!

And he thought her dumb and naïve and cheap. He'd practically said so. She'd been fool enough to accuse him of making a play for her! And he was engaged to that smooth, dark girl! What chance did she have?

Tiger eyes, Jim had called hers. And there was something of the tigress in Patty, too, something primitive, predatory. And because she was like that, her heart reached out and caught at the barest whisperings of hope.

Why should Jim and that girl keep their engagement a secret? If you loved a man and he loved you back, what reason could there be for waiting?

She would start immediately to make herself over into the kind of girl Jim Shane could love. But at every encounter with him, she'd raise her shield of defiance. She'd never let him guess she cared—until the time came for action.

"YOU look as if you belong in the setting, Patty," Jim Shane told her, "so for Pete's sake, unlax."

Unlax, she thought turbulently.

Unlax, when Jim's very nearness turned her nerves to twanging wires and her heart to a pinwheel.

But Jim had been right when he said she was like a stray kitten. She did bite and scratch—with words—when she felt the need of defiance. That had become almost automatic with her.

She snapped now, "Well, what do you want me to do? Fall on their necks?"

Jim sighed. "You couldn't find a better-looking bunch of guys to fall for," he reminded her.

When he strode off toward the cameras, Patty was able to collect her thoughts and agree with him. You couldn't find a handsomer group of men, outside of Hollywood, than those gathered now in the taproom of the Palm Tree Country Club.

The players had just finished a bona-fide polo match between a team made up of Hollywood actors and directors and the Southwest Blues, local socialites.

Now they were taking shots in the taproom, with Patty and five other young actresses engaging in chit-chat with the players.

Patty did look as though she belonged in this ivory-walled room, with its herringbone tweed and tartan plaid drapes and upholstery, its mammoth mirrored bar.

Her flaming hair had been subdued into a lustrous, youthful shoulder-length bob. She wore a white sports dress, and the white suède jacket she carried over her arm was so soft it could have been pulled through her bracelet of twisted coral strands.

But the tearing emotions within her warned her that she was the same untutored, blundering girl who had made a fool of herself by asking Jim Shane to sign that contract.

Clayton Rodman, captain of the Blues, came up to her. "Almost time for us to go into our act, Patty," he told her. "As soon as they finish this long shot, they're going to bring the cameras and microphones our way."

"I'm scared," Patty admitted. "This is the first time I've acted for a real take."

Clay smiled down at her. He was a handsome dark man in his early thirties, and he had a way of making a girl feel that she was important to him. "I'm apt to forget my lines when I look into those tawny eyes," he told her.

"Pretend he's Jim," Patty coached herself. She found then that it was easier to smile radiantly up at Clay as she chided, "I'll bet you tell that to all the girls."

"Given time and sufficient encouragement, I could think up some new ones," he told her. "How about downing that cocktail you're toying with and getting a refill before we go into our skit?"

She shook her head. "I'll wait until it's over. Believe me, I'll need one then."

Clay's bold brown eyes moved approvingly over her. "Silly things, those scripts they handed us," he remarked. "I should stand here and waste time talking about polo with a beautiful redhead like you! I hate to have anyone think I'm that dumb."

The cameras rolled up then.

Jim gave the starting signal. Feeling Jim's eyes upon her, Patty was so unnerved she muffed her lines. They had to make three takes before it clicked.

"Whew!" Clay whistled as they finished. "Glad I don't have to do that for a living. And now, Patty, we'll drink to those eyes of yours."

A few moments later, Patty downed her cocktail. It was warm and steadying.

"That calls for another," Clay said as he motioned to the bartender. "Patty, how about letting me think up some nifties I don't tell all the girls over dinner tonight?"

"Oh, why—I'd like that," she said a trifle breathlessly. After all, Clayton Rodman was a pretty wonderful dish for any girl. Jim would be impressed when he heard she had a date

with Clay. She'd see that he heard of it, too.

Patty's courage had been bolstered by a second cocktail and more flattery when Jim came up to them. He said curtly, "Station wagon's waiting, Patty."

"Skip it, Patty," Clay told her. "I'll drive you back."

"Sorry, Rodman," Jim said firmly. "I've got to check all the girls in."

Clay said, good-naturedly enough, "Who is this guy, Patty—your keeper?"

Despite the drinks and Clay's interest in her, Jim's presence unhinged Patty's nerves. And her smile and her voice were a trifle strained as she said, "Only during working hours."

"Okay, beautiful," Clay said. "I'll call for you around eight."

Anger flashed briefly in Jim's eyes; then he turned and strode toward the door.

Patty followed, her back rigid. Anyway, a date with Clayton Rodman was a step up—she hoped.

ON an evening a week later, Patty returned from the studio and flopped wearily on the divan in her apartment. She had been working hard, putting everything she had into her dancing lessons, reciting meaningless lines, walking endlessly up and down the stairs with books balanced on her head.

She wished she didn't have to dress and go out with Clay tonight. But that was part of her work, too, part of becoming the sort of girl Jim could love.

Up until now Clay hadn't asked anything but to have fun with her. How long that would continue, Patty didn't know.

Jim was different, a being apart, but her opinion of men in general hadn't changed any. She didn't imagine Clay was unlike the men she had known during the years she'd lived with her father.

But certainly he looked and dressed and talked differently. And he took her to his clubs, dancing at the newest night spots, places where she mingled with his friends, had a chance to acquire ease and sophistication.

A loud knock sounded on her door. With an effort she roused herself to answer it. That would be more flowers from Clay, she imagined. The apartment already looked like a florist shop.

Her breath left her in a startled gasp as she opened the door to Jim.

He grinned. "I'm not breaking our contract, Patty—this isn't a date. I just dropped by to talk to you for a moment."

She flushed as she supposed she always would at any mention of that contract. Her hands went up to her disheveled hair. Jim would have to find her like this—mussed and disheveled.

"I'm a sight," she apologized. Excitement caused her to add a bit too effusively, "I'm just about to drag myself into my glad rags to go dancing with the boy friend."

"That would be Clayton Rodman," Jim said. It was not a question.

Patty flopped into the nearest chair. Her knees felt like water.

But Jim remained standing and looked about him. "You've done very well with this place, Patty," he told her.

She agreed silently. She was proud of the apartment. One of the girls from the Four Star's art department had helped her with the decorating.

The walls of the living room were lettuce green; colorful chintz covered the chairs and divan, the wide windows overlooked the blue Pacific. And tonight tall yellow roses and masses of gardenias filled white porcelain vases and crystal bowls.

Jim sat down in a chair opposite her. His eyes held hers. She clasped her hands tightly in her lap. What had he come about? Perhaps she wasn't making good at the studio, even though she was trying so hard.

"Rodman's giving you a rush, isn't he, Patty?" he asked then.

She took quick refuge in defiance. "And since when did you turn Sherlock Holmes?"

"Oh, those things get around." Jim leaned forward. His deep voice was earnest. "Look, Patty, you're playing with fire there. And it worries me. Rodman's too fast company for you. The guy won't do you any good. Why, he's already stacked up three divorces."

AS she looked at Jim, Patty longed to run her fingers through his thick, unruly hair. Her lips ached for the feel of his wide, sensitive mouth on hers. And to keep any trace of her feelings from her voice, she flung out, "Well, at least give the man credit for three sets of honorable intentions."

"Please listen to me," Jim insisted. "Try to understand what I'm getting at. You might as well have it straight, Patty. Rodman has no intention of making a nobody like yourself his fourth wife. Every one of those girls he married was older, sophisticated, from his own social strata, girls who could manage his home, entertain his friends."

He was telling her she wasn't good enough for Clay, and that hurt. "It might surprise you to know how I rate with Clay," she boasted desperately.

A note of pleading came into Jim's voice. "Don't let him take you for a ride, youngster. Between marriages, Clay plays the field with girls like yourself—models, young actresses who are impressed by his position and money. Why, one of our girls at Four Star tried to end it all with poison—over him."

What he was telling her about Clay didn't mean a thing to Patty because Clay didn't mean a thing to her. She said militantly, "Well, don't worry about me. I'm not the end-it-all type. And I can take care of myself."

"It doesn't look like it," Jim insisted. "But I don't know what more I can do than warn you. Perhaps I didn't do you a good turn by signing you up." He got to his feet. His patience seemed to have exhausted itself. His voice had a harsh edge as he added, "I just gave you a chance at more dynamite than you'd have had going your own way."

Patty sprang to her feet. The fierce urge to give way to her real feelings for Jim was almost overpowering. To deny that urge, she flung out savagely, "What do you want me to do? Sit home and twiddle my thumbs? Don't you want me to look at a man?"

He took a step toward her. His hand went out to her, jerked back.

Unstrung, beyond thought, the stray kitten in her asserted itself. "What are you saving me for?" she cried. "Yourself?"

For a moment Jim looked as though he wanted to strike her.

Then he slumped. He looked suddenly older than his twenty-eight years. "I give up," he said helplessly. Then he turned and left the apartment, banging the door behind him.

Patty slumped down on the divan, gave way to racking sobs. She'd done it again—insulted Jim—unpardonably. She just wasn't responsible when she was near him. She loved him so much she went goofy trying not to show it—and she said awful things.

Some way she'd have to apologize! But how?

"I HAVE to see Mr. Shane," Patty told Denise Williams.

"But that's impossible," Denise said crisply. "He's in conference."

Patty wondered if she only imagined that Denise's dark eyes were hostile. She had no sympathy for

Denise or any girl who pretended to love a man and waited.

"But it's urgent," she insisted. "I'll only be a moment" Her nerves were keyed to the breaking point. If she had to wait, she might weaken and not be able to go through with her plan.

Something of her tension seemed to transmit itself to Denise. Denise said reluctantly, "Well, I'll see."

As Denise left to go into the office marked "Private," Patty slipped the glove from her left hand and twisted the ring on the third finger. It was a good imitation of a six-carat diamond, made by the man who copied jewels to be used in the movies.

When Clay had left for Florida with the polo team, planning to be gone several weeks, Patty had decided to act and act fast. Before he returned, she'd get out of this—somehow.

Denise opened the door of Jim's office. "Mr. Shane will see you," she added curtly. "For a moment."

Jim scowled as Patty entered his office. It was their first encounter since that evening in Patty's apartment.

She crossed quickly to his desk, smiling stiffly. "I came to apologize for the way I treated you the other evening," she said hurriedly. She held up her left hand, twisted the ring around. "You can see now why I resented the way you talked about Clay."

Jim looked as though she'd struck him. "So that's what you wanted, Patty," he said grimly.

His reaction wasn't at all what she had expected. The defiance she always gave in to returned. "Clayton Rodman is a man almost any girl would want," she flared. "And just as I kept your secret, I expect you to keep mine. We don't want to announce it yet."

Jim said evenly, "I'll keep your secret, and I hope you'll be happy." There was an undercurrent of sadness in his voice as he added, "Somehow I'd expected better things of you, Patty."

She said glibly, "I wanted you to be the first to know."

As she hurried out the door, she noticed that she'd left it partly open when she went in. Oh, well, what if Denise had heard? She might even be impressed by that faked engagement.

The way Jim had taken her news puzzled Patty, but it didn't get her down. She felt Jim must think more of her if he believed she was a girl Clay wanted to marry. By the time Clay returned, she would have given Jim some reason for breaking with Clay.

Her scheme was working pretty well—so far, she decided.

But that was before she read in the Hollywood *Tattler* the next afternoon, and an avalanche of reporters and photographers greeted her when she returned to her apartment.

Patty was terrified. Denise Williams must be responsible for this. Denise must have overheard Patty talking to Jim about her engagement to Clay and given the item to the *Tattler*.

Somehow Patty managed to get rid of the reporters. But Jim would learn the truth eventually and find out that her engagement was only a fake. When he did find out, she would lose every chance of winning his love. That thought seemed to be the end of the world to Patty.

She had only one hope. If she could reach Clay, she would tell him the truth, appeal to him to help her.

But frantic long-distance calls could not reach Clay. She could not risk a telegram; someone other than Clay might read it.

Everything she'd done was crazy. Jim would never understand any of it.

Through that night—the longest she'd ever known—and the tortuous next day, she stayed in her apartment, not daring to go to the studio.

She stopped trying to evade re-

porters; she just told them it was all a mistake. And they went away, not believing her.

She guessed it was another reporter when she went to answer the doorbell that evening. Instead it was Clay.

The blood drained from her face. It was as though she faced a ghost. "You!" she breathed.

He didn't seem angry. His eyes were puzzled as they searched her face. "Yes, I flew back to find out what all this is about," he told her.

"Come—come in," she said weakly. "Oh, Clay, I've been trying to phone you, to tell you it was a gag."

"I get it—publicity," he said evenly.

"No—something more important than that. It was to—to impress another man. I'll have to begin at the beginning. Sit down."

Clay straddled a chair, but Patty remained standing, pacing the room. "I bought a ring, a phony," she said. "I told Jim Shane you and I were engaged. I meant to keep it a secret. I—"

The ringing of the doorbell cut her short. In panic, she told Clay, "That's probably a reporter. Keep out of sight."

But it was Jim. He came in, shut the door behind him. His mouth cut a grim gash across his dark, tight-set face.

"This is the end," Patty thought despairingly. The pain in her heart seemed unbearable. She'd have to tell him about the ring—before Clay did. Clay had stepped into the alcove, out of sight, but sooner or later Jim would know he was there.

A spark of defiance came to her aid even then, edging her voice as she said, "I was trying to make myself over to be real—for you, Jim. And you don't even know a real thing when you see it. You couldn't tell a real diamond from—from paste."

From the table she grabbed up the paste ring, held it out to him. "This is a phony—I bought it myself."

Jim's dark brows drew together in a frown. "You mean you aren't really engaged to Rodman?" he demanded.

Then Clay stepped forward. Jim gave a start of surprise as he saw him.

"That's for me to answer," Clay said.

But Patty went on, "I didn't mean it to get out and embarrass Clay—or —or anybody."

"I don't get what this is all about," Clay said, "but you know, Patty, you've given me an idea. In fact, I think I'll change that phony for a real diamond."

Patty felt as if her feet were twin tops. She was spinning around and around in a dizzy, chaotic world. Blindly, she thrust the ring toward Clay. "Here!" she jerked out.

Clay stepped back, his eyes questioning.

"Thought it was a phony—not his," Jim barked.

"Oh, it isn't," Patty wailed and dropped the ring into his hand. "I'm crazy. I don't know what I'm doing. Get out—both of you—and let me think."

"Get out, Rodman," Jim said tersely. "What I've got to say doesn't concern you."

"I don't know about that," Clay said easily, "but I'm getting out—for now. Personally, I think we're all crazy." He left them then.

Tears ran unheeded down Patty's cheeks. Stripped of the last vestige of her defiance, she turned to Jim. "You'll hate me, but I have to tell you. That insulting contract I made you sign—asking you if you were saving me for yourself—it was all just defiance. I was ashamed, so afraid you might suspect how I really felt about things. The phony ring was just my way of trying to fix things up."

"Hold on a minute, Patty," Jim said quietly. His hands closed on her shoulders, forced her down on the divan. He sat down beside her.

"Let me talk first," he said. "You

were right when you said I wasn't offering you a job for nothing."

Her eyes went wide in disbelief.

Jim went on doggedly, "You were right when you asked me if I was saving you for myself—because I was."

"Oh, no!" she gasped.

"I didn't know it myself—until today," he told her. "I thought I was a right guy, giving a deserving kid a break. But it wasn't that, Patty. From the first I wanted to take care of you. I know why now. It took Denise to open my eyes."

He took both her hands in his. "Could you care for a dumbbell like me who didn't realize until today that he loved you beyond belief—because I do, Patty."

Patty's heart took wings and joy flooded through her. This must be a dream, but if it was, she never wanted to wake up.

"But Denise?" she asked.

"Denise accused me of loving you, honey—that was what made me realize that I did. Denise and I had companionship—not love. Neither of us was in any hurry to get married—that's why we didn't announce it. Denise said you loved me, honey. Was she right?"

For answer Patty's arms went out to him. Her eyes were starry as she raised them to his. "Oh, Jim darling," she breathed ecstatically, "I love you so I guess I'd always have kept on fighting for you—and most always doing things backwards to try to win your love."

Jim's lips were close to hers. "I went through torture when I thought you were going to marry Rodman, sweet," he said. "Even then I didn't know it was love. I want to marry you right away, honey. I want to start taking care of you and making you happy—for always."

His strong fingers lifted her chin. His mouth claimed hers, hungry yet at the same time sweet and tender. And Patty gave herself up to the heaven of his kiss.

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. . . SUPER-MYSTERY COMICS

In His Debt

By Rowena Farrar

"Darling," Ray said, "you take my breath away tonight. Every man in this night club is envying me."

JENNIFER LANE paused in the doorway, a slender figure in a pale yellow evening dress, her golden hair a shining crown. Her cornflower-blue eyes, surrounded by smoky lashes, swept slowly over the shabby little room. They came to rest finally on the young man hunched over the battered piano near the window.

It was long after midnight, but he was still hard at work, his sensitive fingers roving expertly over the keyboard. His dark, slightly wavy hair was falling over his eyes, and now and then he stopped to thrust it back out of his way. It was a familiar gesture, one that she had always adored.

"Hello, Peter," she said finally, bracing herself for his smile.

At the sound of her voice, Peter Strong whirled around on the piano stool. He gave her the sort of eager smile of welcome that always lit up his face. Tonight, for the first time, it turned a sharp knife in Jennifer's heart.

The Other Man Was Out to Smash Her Wedding!

He sprang to his feet and came quickly toward her. "I've knocked on your door a dozen times tonight, darling," he said worriedly. "Where have you been?"

She stepped beyond the reach of his arms, so that she could say what she had come to say without faltering.

"I—I had a date," she told him, "with the most charming man. He took me to the theater and then to supper. We—we drank champagne and ate the most heavenly food. He bought me these orchids—oh, Peter, it was wonderful!"

The smile faded slowly from Peter's dark eyes and friendly mouth; he looked pale and tired and worried. Jennifer had expected that. It was bound to hurt just at first. She herself felt a driving pain, but of course it wouldn't last.

"And did he—kiss you good night?" Peter asked jealously.

Jennifer hesitated, but only for a moment. "Yes," she said evenly, "he did. And I liked it. As a matter of fact, I—I loved it!" She lifted defiant eyes to his, as if challenging him to contradict her.

"I—see," he said slowly.

"I'm going to marry him," she rushed on brightly. "I'm going to marry him and live in a penthouse. I'm going to have clothes and servants and cars. I'm going to Palm Beach and Sun Valley and—and everywhere. I'm the luckiest girl in the world!"

"You—you won't be happy," Peter warned her, "unless you love him."

"I do love him. I do. That's the wonderful part of it. He's young and handsome and sophisticated—everybody is crazy about him. It's amazing that he wants to marry me—a wonderful, romantic, amazing break."

"Any man would want to marry you." Peter looked down at his shabby shoes.

"But I pound a piano in a five-and-ten-cent store," Jennifer reminded him. "I've never had any decent clothes. I've never been anywhere. I've never done anything exciting or glamorous or—or—"

"Romantic?" Peter supplied the word. "I guess it isn't very romantic living in this dump, eating hamburgers at the corner drugstore, helping me with my songs at night so that some day—"

"'Some day' is a very uncertain term," Jennifer said practically. "We—we can't afford even to think of getting married. Some day might never come."

"If it's marriage you want," Peter said swiftly, hopefully, "I'm willing. I hadn't asked you, because I wanted to wait until I could take care of you properly. I—I haven't much to offer just now—except my love. But some day my songs will click, and then—"

Jennifer shook her head. "It couldn't be perfect, Peter. We'd want it to be, but it couldn't. We'd nag at each other because we'd be tired and cross and worried. We'd get in each other's way, living in one room, or maybe two. Oh, Peter, can't you see? I'm so tired of being gallantly poor. I want the beautiful things in life while I'm young and eager and—and pretty. Can't you understand?"

PETER stared at her small, determined chin, at her sweetly curved lips, at her velvet-smooth skin, at her glowing eyes and shining hair, at the whole slender perfection of her, standing there before him. "All right," he said huskily. "I—I don't blame you at all. You belong among beautiful things, not in this ugly, shabby dump of a rooming house. Go to it, kid. And I hope you'll be the happiest girl in the world."

Jennifer felt a rush of grateful tears stinging her eyelids. Peter was the grandest sort of guy. She might have known he would understand.

"And we—can still be friends?"

"Afraid not," he said gruffly. "You can't be just friends with a girl you've kissed, a girl you've held in your arms, a girl you've loved with every breath you drew. No, thanks."

"Then—we won't be seeing each other any more—" Her voice broke, but she went on, "I'm—I'm moving uptown. Ray wants me to have a better address. He's going to buy my trousseau. I'm giving up my job. We're planning to be married in June."

"Ray?"

"Yes. Raymond Madden. I'm going to be Mrs. Raymond Madden!" She lifted her lovely head and managed a proud smile. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"You couldn't possibly love Raymond Madden," Peter said sharply. "That guy's been married twice already. His wealthy friends would snub you. His ex-wives would sneer at you. He wouldn't be true to you. Darling, use your head!"

"That's exactly what I'm doing," she said stubbornly. "You don't know him personally, so how can you judge? He loves me. He wants me because I'm different. He—he needs me. And I need him. We—we love each other."

"A girl can't love two men at once," Peter said. "Your eyes and lips have betrayed you a thousand times. You love me."

"Not any more," she said desperately. "I did love you, but not any more. I've stopped. I'm going to forget there ever was a Peter Strong in my life. I'm going to forget the times I've gone hungry, the stockings I've worn with runs all over them, the shoes with holes in the bottoms, the hash and beans and hamburgers. And you must forget me, too. It will be good for both of us—to spread out. Good-by, Peter."

"Ray Madden shan't have you," Peter said harshly.

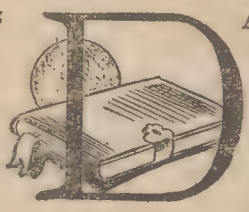
"It's all settled. There's nothing you can do!"

"I'll think of something," Peter assured her. "But until I do—this will have to serve."

He reached out and took hold of her, swept her against him, crushed her lips beneath his in a kiss that claimed her, a kiss that would not rub off easily—a kiss that would linger long after their lips had parted.

Jennifer pounded his chest with tight little fists. She struggled with all her might to break away from him. But he refused to let her go until he had deliberately churned her emotions into chaos. At last, when tears began to stream down her cheeks, he released her.

Sobbing, ashamed and indignant and still determined, Jennifer turned quickly and ran away from him.



"DARLING," Ray Madden said tenderly, his gray eyes roving over Jennifer, as she sat across from him at the Silver Spoon, "you take my breath away tonight. Every man in this night club is envying me. They want to know who you are. They want to try to take you away from me. I'm not introducing you to my friends until you're safely mine."

Jennifer laughed radiantly because she didn't care about meeting anyone just yet. She wanted to be sure of herself first. She was dressed exquisitely in pale-green satin. There was a huge diamond on her finger.

Life had suddenly changed from a drab struggle to make ends meet into a glorious adventure. She sipped her after-dinner coffee, and smoked a cigarette. Bright colors, soft music, and gay dancers formed a brilliant background for romance.

As usual, Ray was spending more in one evening than she and Peter had made together in a week, but she had sternly forbidden herself the nostalgic pleasure of making such comparisons. Peter Strong was a closed chapter. In another week, immersed as she was in glamorous living, she would have forgotten him completely and forever.

Perhaps she'd never see him again, she realized. That was as it should be, for of course you couldn't love two men at once, and she was determined

to love Ray as he deserved. He had been so wonderful to her, selecting her beautiful clothes, her lovely little apartment, sending her flowers every day, making her part of the glittering New York that she had read about enviously in the papers—all because he wanted her to become accustomed to the world she would live in as his wife.

"Having a good time, Jennifer?" he asked, leaning over the table.

She met his adoring, hungry look with a gay smile, and yet, as quickly as possible, she turned her eyes away. He mustn't look at her like that, as if soon he intended to devour her. There would be time enough for such ardent glances after they were married, after her love had grown to equal his.

"Are we staying for the floor show?" she inquired.

"If you like."

"I'd love it."

The elaborate floor show began almost immediately. They came to the Silver Spoon several nights a week, and Jennifer had seen the acts before, but they were still new and wonderful to her. There were lovely dancing girls, a juggler, a glamorous blues singer, a comedy dancing team, and finally a young man with a haunting tenor voice.

The young tenor stepped forward to make a special announcement. He stood in a circle of bright light, his hands raised in a signal for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began smilingly, "it gives me great pleasure tonight to sing a brand-new song which I believe will become an instant favorite from coast to coast. It is called 'You Can't Stop Caring,' and it was written by a talented young man named Peter Strong. It goes like this—"

The orchestra gave the tune a dramatic build up, and the tenor sang Peter's new song to a hushed, critical audience. The melody was tender and catchy and unforgettable. The words were poignant, compelling. A thrill swept over the room.

JENNIFER had paled at mention of the title and the author. She was terribly glad that at last Peter had written a song worth publishing. After the first few strains, she knew, and everyone listening knew, that "You Can't Stop Caring," had that intangible something of which hits are made. She began to listen more closely to the words, and suddenly, like a blow in the face, came the realization that Peter had written this song for her.

He was telling her, in the language he knew best, that she couldn't stop loving him just because she wanted to, that she couldn't forget him no matter how hard she tried, that she was sentencing herself to a life of pretending, if she married a man she did not love.

"I'll think of something," Peter had said that night. And he had.

Jennifer sat perfectly still, her heart trembling strangely, her hands clenched tightly in her lap. The tenor sang the chorus again as an encore, and every word hammered its way into her secret heart.

"I—I want to go home," she said to Ray, who was instantly filled with concern. Her cheeks were deathly pale and her eyes too bright.

"You go straight to bed," he told her at her door. "You need rest. I've been keeping you up too late. You're not used to living the life of a night owl. I don't want you to get tired. Sleep until noon tomorrow."

She closed her door with a sigh of relief, and raced across the room to the telephone. She wanted to call Peter, pour out her heart to him, admit that she still loved him, that she couldn't stop caring for him, that his song was beautiful and true, that she was so proud of him and glad for him.

But when she started to dial his number, the huge diamond on her finger glittered up at her, mocking her with its cruel beauty. Slowly, regretfully, she replaced the telephone in its cradle. It was too late. She had no right to call Peter or any other man.

She belonged to Ray now. The dress she was wearing, all the beautiful clothes in her closet, the bracelets jangling on her arms, the ring on her finger, the flowers in her hair—everything she had had come to her as gifts to a loving bride. She had no idea how much money her fiancé had spent on her, but it was enough to bind her to him forever—or at least for as long as he wanted her.

SHE had no idea how long she stood there, staring dully at the telephone, realizing fully her position, her emotions a clashing torment. She was startled by the sudden ringing of the telephone. She picked up the receiver with trembling hands. "Hello," she said faintly.

"That you, Jennifer?"

It was Peter. She was too stunned to reply. For days after she had moved away from the little dump of a rooming house, she had thought Peter might call her, in spite of what she had done to him.

"Say something, Jennifer!" Peter's voice sang over the wire. "Did you hear my song tonight?"

Jennifer nodded, forgetting that he could not see her.

"I'm on my way up to see you," he rushed on, "to thank you personally for stepping out of my life. You were right, Jennifer. It did us both good to —spread out. If your meal ticket is still there, get rid of him right away. Do you hear?"

"You mustn't come up here, Peter," Jennifer told him worriedly.

But he had hung up.

He banged loudly on her door ten minutes later, and she opened it guardedly. He strode grandly into the room, swaying slightly, spots of bright color in his cheeks.

"Hello, beautiful," he greeted her familiarly. "How's the glamour girl? Happy?"

"Peter!" Jennifer wailed. "You're drunk!"

"Sure I'm drunk. Gloriously drunk! Otherwise you couldn't have dragged me up here with a team of mules. Just wanted to thank you very, very personally for giving me the gate. My song's a terrific hit. I wrote it right after you left me. Going to write another terrific hit. Kiss me for luck, Jennifer."

"Get out!" she flamed. "Please get out!" She struggled against him, as she had once before, only this time he was a different Peter, a Peter with bitter eyes and a mocking smile. The love and tenderness were gone. It was unbearable to see him like this.

He pressed a bold kiss on her lips and then he pushed her away from him.

"I hate you," she blazed, rubbing her mouth.

"Good!" he retorted. "You'll be hearing another Peter Strong hit tune very soon. I'm going to dedicate it to you." Then he turned and left.

Her fury mounted slowly until she was in a fine state. She crawled into bed finally and lay in the darkness hating him. Before she finally drifted off to sleep she convinced herself that she was glad he had come, glad he had insulted her. It made things much easier now. Hating him so left her free to love Ray.

BUT as the days flew by and her wedding date drew nearer, Jennifer found it necessary to stuff cotton in her ears if she wanted to have any peace at all.

"You Can't Stop Caring" had clicked in a big way. You heard it every time you switched on the radio. You heard it everywhere an orchestra played. It was sung by velvet-throated sirens, by swing fiends, by silver-voiced tenors, by lyric sopranos. You heard people whistling it along the streets.

Jennifer's maid hummed it constantly as she went about her duties.

"Stop that!" Jennifer said crossly to her one morning.

"Ah'm sorry. I always hums when I works," the maid apologized.

"I don't mind your humming," Jennifer told her, "but please, not that song."

"Ah'll try to remember, Miss Jennifer, but you sure is gettin' jittery lately, if you don't mind my saying so."

That same night Ray stood over Jennifer, frowning slightly. She was wearing a lovely gown of dusty rose that should have inspired her to sit up proudly, her head high. But she was slumped down in a chair, staring out the window.

"Where do you want to go tonight?" he asked.

"Nowhere!" Jennifer snapped nervously.

"What's the matter with you, darling?"

Jennifer shrugged. "Nothing."

"You're not double-crossing me, are you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Certainly not!" She aroused herself by sheer force of will. "I'm just tired of night clubs, tired of theaters, drinking, dancing—"

"I've let you make a fool of me," Ray said slowly, regarding her thoughtfully. "I've given you everything your greedy little heart desired, and so far it's all been very one-sided. I want to marry you, Jennifer, but if you're unwilling, perhaps we can square things some other way."

"How?" she inquired in a small, hopeful voice.

"You figure it out," Ray said bluntly. "Remember, I don't give something for nothing. I've had quite a bit of experience with women, my dear, and I know what I want."

"So do I know what I want," Jennifer told him swiftly, managing a bright, assuring smile. "I want to be your wife. I'm just a nervous bride, that's all, Ray, really."

ON the night before their wedding, Ray gave a large supper party at the Silver Spoon. Champagne flowed freely, and there was much clever repartee and bright laughter. Ray seemed proud of Jennifer's beauty and youth and freshness beside the dissipated faces of his friends.

Jennifer struggled hard to be eager and loving and radiant. And she succeeded—until the orchestra played "You Can't Stop Caring."

At the first notes of that disturbing tune, she clutched her champagne glass in trembling fingers, drained it, and promptly asked for more. The champagne gave her a false lift, and for a while she was able to carry on, as gay and radiant as any bride could be.

At midnight, however, just as the celebration had risen to its gayest peak, Jennifer received another telling blow.

A new song by Peter Strong was announced from the floor, the title of it being "Remember, Jennifer." A girl sang it, a slender creature with smoldering eyes, dark hair and a husky voice. The melody was, if possible, even more arresting than the other, and the words were hauntingly tender.

Once again Jennifer sat in stunned silence while the words and music cut through her fixed smile and ground her heart into tears. Peter was getting his revenge, cruel, inescapable. She couldn't bear it another moment.

Without thinking or caring, she jumped to her feet and ran across the floor to the dressing room for her wrap, sobbing crazily, her only need to get beyond the sound of Peter's song.

Ray watched her go, a dark scowl of suspicion on his face. The rest of his guests, as well as the people at adjoining tables, stared curiously at her.

When she reached her apartment, Jennifer went immediately into the bedroom and took off everying Ray had given her. She rummaged frantically in the closet until she found her battered suitcase and the few shabby garments she had saved from the ob-

literation of that other life. She put on an old, shiny suit and felt much better.

But when she returned to the living room, Ray was there, standing between her and the door. "You have something to tell me, I believe," he said bluntly.

"Yes," she said raggedly. "I have. I—I tried to love you, Ray, but I never have, and—never will. I'm sorry. That's the brutal truth. You see, when I met you I was in love with someone else—a poor struggling song writer. But I wanted the things you could give me, so I set out to forget him."

"Peter Strong!" Ray growled jealousy. "He's been writing songs about you!"

Jennifer nodded. "He—he wouldn't let me forget. But I really tried, Ray."

"And so," he said darkly, "you don't want to marry me."

"I can't marry you," she said desperately. "I—just—can't!"

There was a moment of taut silence.

"I thought you were innocent and fresh and honest. I thought you were different from the others. But you're worse. You take everything and give nothing. You—"

"You couldn't possibly want me now," Jennifer said, "knowing how I feel—how much I love someone else. Please take back everything you've given me—the dresses, the jewelry, everything. And make a list of the other items—for rent and flowers and food and shows. I'll pay it all back, every cent, if it takes the rest of my life.

"I—I don't like myself any more than you like me. I've found out that I didn't even know what the beautiful things in life were. You have to earn them to be able to appreciate them. I'm going to look for a job in the morning. If you'll be a good sport about this, I'll be grateful to you forever."

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"You really love that guy enough to go back to pounding a piano in a five-and-ten?" Ray asked.

"Yes. I'll scrub floors. I'll wait on tables. I'll take any sort of job—just so I can be free from—from pretending."

"I—guess you win," Ray said. "It's a blow to my plans. My friends will think I'm slipping—"

"You can say you changed your mind about marrying me," Jennifer suggested eagerly. "Anything! I won't mind."

He shrugged heavily. "All right," he said slowly, then added gruffly, "but get out before I change my mind."

"Good-by," she told him gratefully, offering her hand. "And thank you, Ray. You've done your good deed for today."

"I'm a fool to let you get away with this," he said ruefully, "and you're a fool, too, Jennifer."

"No. I was a fool," she said clearly.

THE shabby little dump of a rooming house was dark and silent as Jennifer crept up the steps and rang the doorbell. It was a long time before Mrs. Brown came to the door, her straggly hair in curlers, a soiled robe about her shoulders.

"Land sakes!" she said. "If it isn't Miss High-and-mighty come back to us!"

"Is my old room available?" Jennifer asked anxiously. "I want it back, Mrs. Brown."

Mrs. Brown hesitated, eyeing Jennifer suspiciously. But there was something about Jennifer's earnest, wistful look that softened her.

"There's a girl occupying it, but she wants a roommate. It comes cheaper that way, you know. Or do you care?"

"The cheaper the better," Jennifer said. "I'll take it. Is—is Peter Strong still living here?"

"Oh, no! He's in the money now. He's got a swanky new apartment uptown. I always knew that boy was go-

ing places. He's come by it honestly, too."

With this parting dig, she left Jennifer at the door of her old room. Jennifer went in quietly, undressed in the dark, and crept into bed. The other girl was snoring loudly, unconscious of the fact that she had acquired a roommate.

Jennifer lay in the darkness fighting a gallant battle against a regiment of tears. Across the hall some stranger occupied Peter's old room. Nothing could ever be the same again. Peter was gone. Peter had moved away. Peter was prosperous now. Somehow, she hadn't thought of that angle before. She had always visualized him in the same room, hunched over the same battered piano.

A little while before, she had rashly thought she could come back and take up with Peter where she had left off. But now, of course, she realized that was impossible. She couldn't go to him in his new life and ask to be taken in. She deserved no share in his success, for she had deserted him deliberately and cold-bloodedly. By being greedy and selfish and self-centered, she had lost everything. Tears coursed slowly down her cheeks and dripped on the lumpy pillow.

THE next morning she squared her shoulders and set off to get her old job back. But there was a girl perched on the stool pounding away for dear life, a girl who was perfectly satisfactory.

"In fact," the manager took delight in informing her, she can play rings around you."

"I deserve all I'm getting," Jennifer told herself, as she hurried unsuccessfully from store to store.

At last, weary and footsore, she bought a paper, sat down on a park bench, and turned anxiously to the help-wanted ads.

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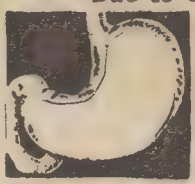

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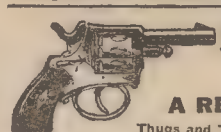
If you suffer from rheumatic or neuritis pain, try this simple inexpensive home recipe. Get a package of Ru-Ex Compound, a two week's supply, mix it with a quart of water, add the juice of 4 lemons. Often within 48 hours—sometimes overnight—splendid results are obtained. If the pains do not quickly leave you, return the empty package and Ru-Ex will cost you nothing to try. It is sold under an absolute money-back guarantee. Ru-Ex Compound is for sale by drug stores everywhere.



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ABBOTT MAGIC NOV. CO., Box F. Colon Mich

There were dozens of ads for experienced cooks, maids, laundresses, stenographers, bookkeepers, secretaries, beauty operators, but Jennifer was experienced in none of those lines.

Finally, through tears that almost blinded her, an ad caught her eye and caused her to sit up quickly. Someone was advertising for a secretary who could talk intelligently over the telephone and could read and transcribe musical notes.

Jennifer felt herself well qualified on both counts. Anyone could talk intelligently over the telephone, and she had helped Peter so many nights with his music. She tore out the ad and made a dash for the bus. The ad said to apply in person at once, and gave an address on Riverside Drive.

There were a dozen applicants for the position sitting around the small reception room, p o w d e r i n g their noses from time to time, looking anxiously and hopefully at the inner door. Jennifer sat down on the one vacant chair and folded her hands in her lap. She was afraid that with so much competition she wouldn't have a chance, but it wouldn't hurt to try.

Presently the inner door swung open and a tall, lean, immaculately dressed young man came quickly forward and cast his eyes appreciatively over the waiting girls.

"Who has waited the longest?" he asked pleasantly.

At sight of him, Jennifer jumped to her feet, her cheeks drained of color, her eyes wide.

Peter Strong smiled at her reproachfully. "You came last," he said. "I saw you."

Jennifer took a trembling step toward the door. "I—I'm sorry," she said unsteadily. "Of course I—I wouldn't have come if I'd dreamed—I—I don't want the job."

"Sit down," Peter ordered sternly, and she obeyed.

He turned to the other girls, who were eyeing the scene curiously, and told them the job was filled. Then he

motioned for Jennifer to follow him into his music room.

Dimly she saw the old battered piano in one corner and a bright new grand piano in another. There was a new desk, a lovely view, and the same old familiar smell of Peter's favorite tobacco. All of it together made her want to cry.

Peter stared at her for a long moment, and then slowly, gently, he took her in his arms. "You didn't marry him," he said exultantly. "You couldn't. You found out last night, when you heard my new song, that you couldn't stop loving me—that it would be unbearable even to pretend to love anyone else another moment!"

"Yes," Jennifer confessed. Her eyes were shining with the wonder of being in Peter's arms again. "And now I'm looking for a job."

"Darling," Peter laughed, "you've got a job. I figured you'd be looking for work today if you didn't marry Madden, so I put that ad in the paper. It was a long chance, but I took it, and it brought you straight to me."

"You couldn't possibly want a girl who—who's been such a fool—"

"I couldn't stop loving you," Peter told her gravely, "any more than you could stop loving me. I didn't try except that one night when I came to see you and acted like a heel. I'm ashamed of that, Jennifer."

"Don't be," she said.

"I lost you and found you again through my music," Peter said. "'Remember, Jennifer' is going to be a bigger hit than 'You Can't Stop Caring.' We're on our way, darling. I can ask you to marry me now, knowing that I can take care of you."

"Let me work for you first," Jennifer pleaded. "I've a big debt to pay before I can be your wife. But some day—"

"Some day," Peter told her practically, "is too uncertain. I want my wife now. I don't want to wait forever."

"Neither do I, darling," Jennifer whispered. "Oh, neither do I!"

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29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05	31x4	2.95	1.25
30x4.50-21	2.40	1.15	32x4	2.95	1.25
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25	33x4	2.95	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.25	34x4	3.25	1.35
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25	32x4½	3.35	1.45
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25	33x4½	3.45	1.45
5.25-17	2.90	1.35	34x4½	3.45	1.45
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35	30x5	3.65	1.65
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35	33x5	3.75	1.75
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35	35x5	3.95	1.75
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35			
5.50-17	3.35	1.40			
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40			
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45			
6.00-16	3.75	1.45			
6.00-17	3.40	1.40			
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40			
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45			
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55			
33x6.00-21	3.95	1.55			
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75			

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6.50-20	4.45	1.95	9.00-20	9.95	5.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95	9.75-20	13.95	6.45
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Clothes for the Glamour Season

IT'S the season for glamour—football games, crisp late-fall days, Thanksgiving, the first of Christmas shopping, parties, Christmas itself! It's the time for you to look your smartest and best. Catch up on style, do things to your wardrobe, go in for glamour! You'll have your reward with the next man you meet.

To bring your present wardrobe up to the minute, why not trim an old dress with sequins? They're enough to put any dress into the best-date-dress class. Try a sequin collar, sequin pockets, or a sequin belt. If you want to make last year's dress definitely new, try slipping one of the new jerkins over it, perhaps in another color—a brilliant one, preferably, if it's over black. Jerkins give the new long-line look and are the new, casual note of the season. You can wear one jerkin with several dresses, equally well for evening or for daytime.

The same goes for pinafores. You can wear a velvet one, skirred in the front, perhaps split up the back, over any number of dresses, and look smart every time! By trimming a dress with velvet—a collar, binding, or belt—you add a new note of dressiness to it.

It's a season for jewels — big, theatrical jewels, simulated and so in within reach of everyone! Costume jewelry, just the right necklace, clip or bracelet for the right dress, can do wonders in pepping up a tired wardrobe. The newest pieces are spectacular, glittering stones—just one can make a dress.

And for your sports clothes, why not a short, warm chinchilla coat to go over everything, any time? Or a pinafore in wool, plaid or corduroy, over a variety of tailored blouses? If you have a winter coat you'd like to dress up, wear it with a furred hat, and the effect will be one of luxury!

Today's fashion picture is gay, glittering, charming! Try it on yourself and see!

—CONSTANCE HEWITT

BLEEDING GUMS PYORRHEA TRENCH MOUTH

Don't wait until it's too late and lose your teeth. Science has discovered a simple home remedy called PYRO which has astounded the medical profession. PYRO gets right at the trouble and kills the poisonous germs. One reason why PYRO works so efficaciously is because it actually penetrates the gums, thereby killing the germs inside and out. Remember pyorrhea and trench mouth. If unattended, permits the infection to spread quickly, and before you know it, teeth are rotted and bone construction is destroyed and teeth fall out.

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PYRO was used with startling success many times, in cases that seemed hopeless . . . where everything else failed. PYRO is almost uncanny in getting quick and sure results. It gets to the root of the trouble because PYRO has a penetration of ¼ inch in 5 minutes and it corrects and heals as it penetrates the diseased areas. If your gums are sore or bleed when brushed. . . . If your teeth are loose or pus pockets have formed, order PYRO today for quick correction . . . act now before you lose your teeth entirely.

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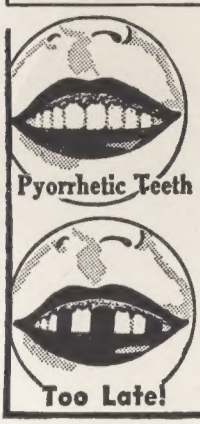
A well-known physician . . . a member of the American Medical Assn., and many other professional organizations, says: "I do not hesitate to state that this solution has saved me from the nightmare of false teeth."



Read This Proof!

Mrs. W. H. Kirby, 45 East 66th Street, New York, writes: "For a number of years I suffered with an advanced case of pyorrhea, constant treatments seemed only to arrest the disease. I was told I would lose my teeth. Then I heard of this new remedy. Being desperate, decided to try it. Am very happy now. My gums are healthy, teeth tight, and write this hoping that others suffering as I, will try it."

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